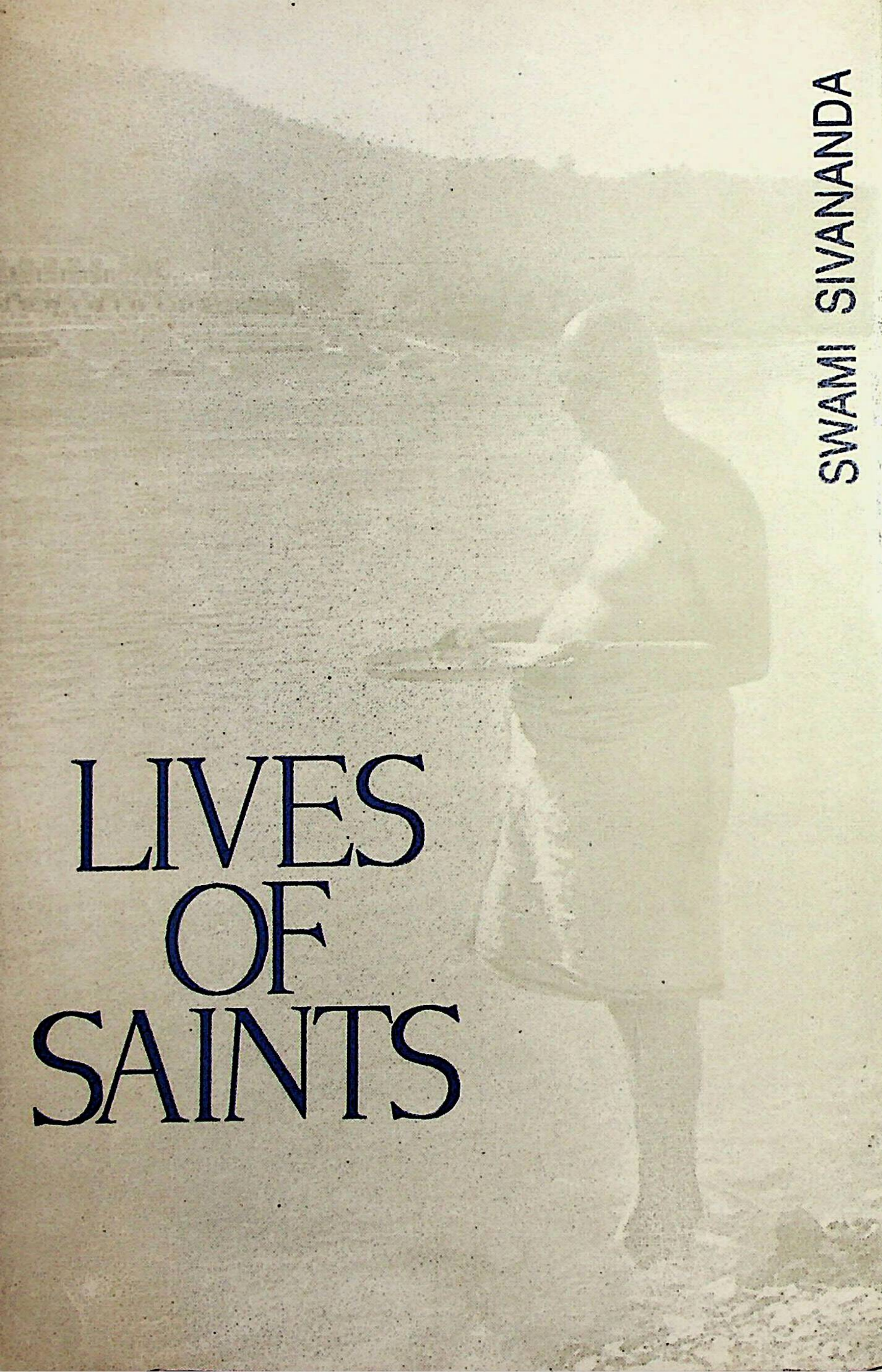

LIVES OF SAINTS

SWAMI SIVANANDA

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SRI SWAMI SIVANANDA

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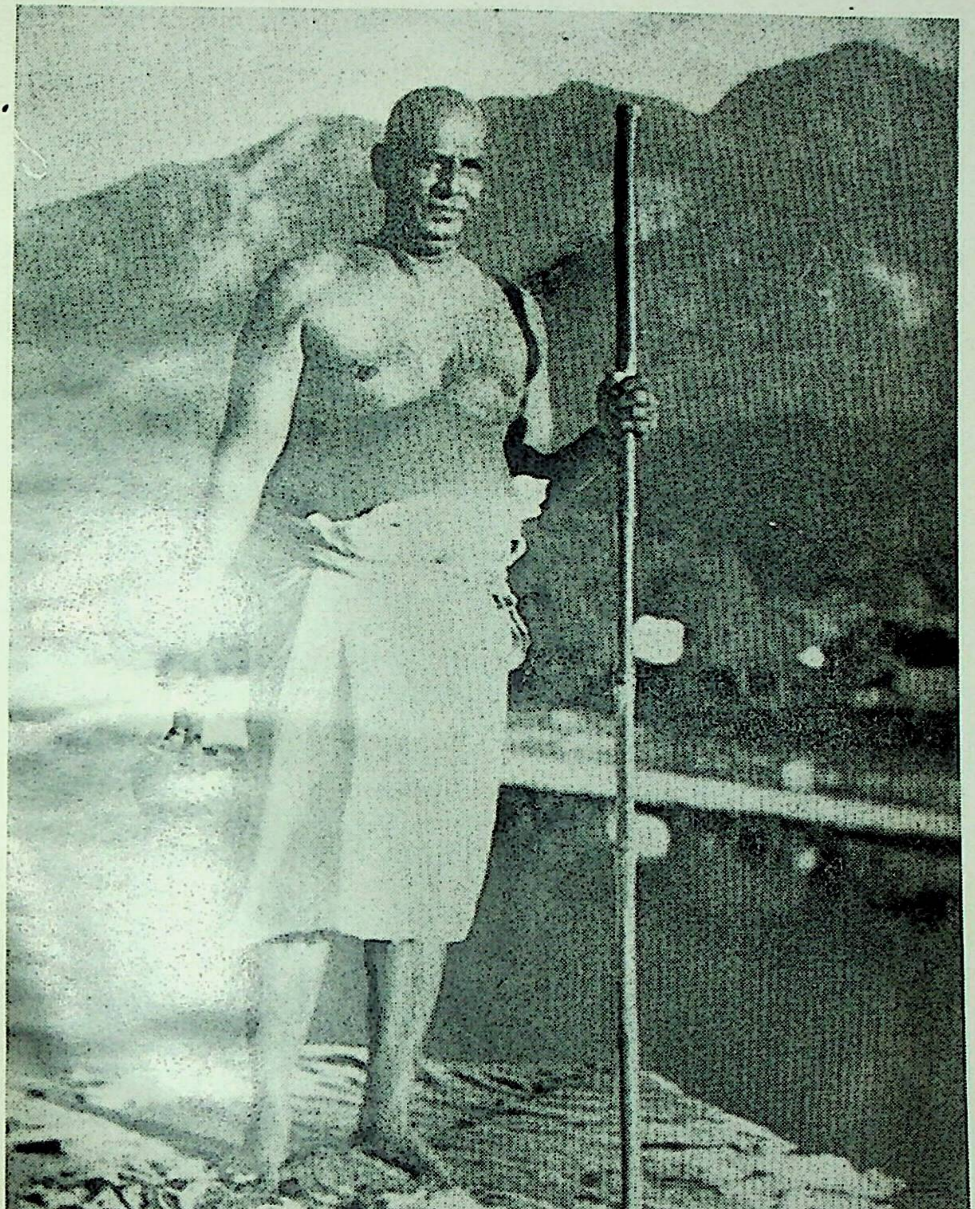

SWAMI SIVANANDA

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

Swami Sivananda's "Lives of Saints" was first published in 1941 and reprinted in 1943 and 1944. A companion second volume, under the same title, followed in 1947, the year of the Master's Diamond Jubilee. It contained life-sketches of many more saints not covered in the original publication.

In the current edition, we have endeavoured to consolidate, not only the stories included in the above two volumes, but also those written by Swami Sivananda in other miscellaneous books. As such, the present publication has verily turned out to be a treasure-trove of inspiring spiritual biography, instructive anecdotes and lofty admonitions of men and women of the highest realisation. For sheer variety and range, this book perhaps has no equal.

Here, two points deserve special mention. Firstly, this book is totally non-sectarian and free from prejudice of any kind. It thus manages with marvellous success to draw out the very best from each subject it touches. Secondly, as these sketches come from the pen of a spiritual personality, they present all the lives in a distinctive spiritual perspective, which a layman writing the same biographies would hardly be able to do. This fact, in itself, enhances the worth and utility of the book a great deal.

We feel privileged to be able to offer this book to the reading public. May the light of these saints guide and illumine the path of the readers. May their blessings shower upon the readers and the whole mankind!

Shivanandanagar,
February 19, 1993. —THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY

PRAYER

O All-Merciful Lord! Time is fleeting. The senses are revolting. The mind is jumping. Maya is deluding. The three fires are burning. The five afflictions are tormenting. Friends are disturbing. Diseases are troubling. The heat of the summer is scorching. Flies, mosquitoes, bugs and scorpions are teasing. The charms of the world are tempting. I can neither concentrate nor meditate. I cannot do anything in the spiritual path without Thy benign grace. O Lord! Thou art an ocean of mercy. Bless me. If I get a drop from that ocean, will it dry up?

O Adorable Lord! People proclaim that Thou art Deenabandhu, Deenanath, Kripa Nidhan, Karuna Sagar, Anatha Rakshaka. Thou hast saved Ahalya, Draupadi, Prahlad, Dhruva, Gajendra, but in my case, Thou hast not done anything. I am still in pain, agony and darkness. I am crying for Thy grace and help. O absentee landlord of this world! Where hast Thou gone?

O Self-Effulgent Lord! The fish cannot live without water. The sunflower cannot live without the sun. The Pativrata cannot live without her husband. The mind cannot live without Prana. The flame of the lamp cannot burn without oil. So also, I cannot live without Thee. O Lord, come, come, enthrone Thyself in my heart. Thou art the Prana of my Pranas. Thou art the Soul of my soul.

Thou art Light Divine. Thou art Light of Knowledge. Thou art the Dispeller of darkness. Thou art the Supreme Guru. Thou art beyond the reach of mind and speech. Thou art beyond any kind of limitation. Thou art the Over-soul. Thou art the Self of this universe.

Thou art self-luminous. Thou art without parts, without actions, without limbs, without any taint or fault, without birth and death. Thou art our Father, Mother, Brother, Friend, Guru, Relative and sole Refuge. Thou art the embodiment of Peace, Bliss, Knowledge, Power, Strength and Beauty.

O All-Merciful Lord! Through Thy grace, may I realise Truth! May I always entertain sublime thoughts! May I realise myself as the Light Divine! May I serve humanity with Atma Bhav! May I be free from greed, lust, egoism, jealousy and hatred! May I behold the one sweet Immortal Self in all beings! May I realise Brahman with pure understanding!

May that Light of lights ever guide me! May He cleanse my mind of all impurities! May He inspire me! May He bestow on me power, courage and strength! May He remove the veil of the mind! May He remove all obstacles in the spiritual path! May He make my life happy and fruitful! I bow to Thee, O Lord of lords, O God of gods, O Deva of Devas, O Brahman of the Upanishads, the Support for Maya and Isvara!

INTRODUCTION

Who is a saint? He who lives in God or the Eternal, who is free from egoism, likes and dislikes, selfishness, vanity, mine-ness, lust, greed and anger, who is endowed with equal vision, balanced mind, mercy, tolerance, righteousness and cosmic love, and who has divine knowledge, is a saint.

Saints and sages are a blessing to the world at large. They are the custodians of superior divine wisdom, spiritual powers and inexhaustible spiritual wealth. Even kings bow their heads at their lotus feet. King Janaka said to Yajnavalkya, "O venerable sage! I am grateful to your exalted holiness for obtaining the ancient wisdom of the Upanishads through your lofty and sublime instructions. I offer my whole kingdom at thy feet. Further, I am thy servant. I will wait on thee like a servant".

Such is the magnanimous nature of saints and sages. Their very existence inspires others and goads them to become like them and attain the same state of bliss achieved by them. Had it not been for their existence, there would not have been spiritual uplift and salvation for you all. Their glory is indescribable. Their wisdom is unfathomable. They are deep like the ocean, steady like the Himalayas, pure like the Himalayan snow, effulgent like the sun. One crosses this terrible ocean of Samsara or births and deaths through their grace and Satsang. To be in their company is the highest education. To love them is the highest happiness. To be near them is real education.

The saints wander from village to village and disseminate divine knowledge. They move from door to door and impart wisdom. They take a little for their bare maintenance and give the highest education, culture and enlightenment to the people. Their very life is exemplary. Whether they deliver lectures or not, whether they hold discourses or not, it matters little.

Saints and sages only can become real advisers to the kings, because they are selfless and possess the highest wisdom. They only can improve the morality of the masses. They only can show the way to attain eternal bliss and immortality. Shivaji had Swami Ramdas as his adviser. King Dasaratha had Maharshi Vasishtha as his adviser.

Study the lives of saints; you are inspired at once. Remember their sayings; you are elevated immediately. Walk in their footsteps; you are freed from pain and sorrow. Therefore, the book "*Lives of Saints*" must be your constant companion. It must be in your pocket always. It must be underneath your pillow.

Do not superimpose defects on the saints on account of your Dosha-drishti or evil eye. You cannot judge their merits. Be humble and sit at their feet. Serve them with your heart and soul, keep them in your garden, clear your doubts. Get instructions and practise them in right earnest. You will certainly be blessed.

Every school, every college, every boarding-house, every jail, every institution, every house, should have a saint for guidance. Saints are in abundance. You do not want them. You do not wish to approach them. You do not wish to serve them. You do not aspire for higher things. You are perfectly satisfied with some broken shells and glass-pieces. There is no thirst or spiritual hunger in you for achieving higher divine knowledge and inner peace.

There is no caste among saints and sages. Do not look to their caste. You will not be benefited. You cannot imbibe their virtues. In higher religion, there is neither caste nor creed. Cobblers, weavers and untouchables had become the best saints. Wisdom and Self-realisation are not the monopoly of Brahmins alone. South Indian Brahmins pay respects and give food only to the Brahmin Dandi-Sannyasins. This is a serious mistake and a grave blunder. What a sad state! That is the reason why saints do not wish to visit South India. Punjab and Gujarat have devotion to all saints. Hence the saints move in those parts and people there derive much spiritual benefit from them.

In placing this book before the public in general, and the aspirants in the spiritual path in particular, it seems proper to write a few lines on the glory of saints. Saints, to whatever clime they may belong, have left their footprints on the sands of time, so that others, who are true and faithful, may follow their track in search of the Eternal Truth. Their lives have ever remained an inspiration to us. Their glory has ever been green in our memory. Their teachings have ever flowed with the tide of life. May they inspire us and guide us for ever!

The present work has been divided into thirteen sections. Saints do not strictly belong to any clime or country and no geographical limits can stop their influence from overflowing the boundaries. They belong to the whole world. Hence, to attach to them any provincial basis is to facilitate the easy understanding of the spiritual current started by each separately and by all conjointly for the spiritual regeneration of the land.

Man feels that he is weak and helpless. He has to counteract such evil tendencies through right exertion and through proper lead. To such persons the lives of saints serve as a guide. They mould their life, their character and their future. They change their mental outlook and convert them to the faith and teachings of their guide. Such true and reliable guides are the saints who have come and gone.

May this world be filled with good saints and sages! May you all attain the supreme goal through their Satsang and advice!! May the blessings of saints and sages be upon you all!!!

Ananda Kutir,
8th January, 1947.

Sivananda

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LIVES OF SAINTS

Saints
of
Ancient Times

MAHARSHI VYASA

In ancient days, our forefathers, the Rishis of Aryavartha, went to the forest to do Tapasya during the four months following Vyasa Purnima—a particular and important day in the Hindu calendar. On this memorable day, Vyasa, an incarnation of the Lord Himself, began to write his *Brahma Sutras*. Our ancient Rishis did this Tapasya in caves and forests. But times have changed and such facilities are not common nowadays although Grihasthas and Rajas are not wanting who are able and willing to place at the disposal of the members of the fourth Ashrama such help and facilities as they can afford. The forests and caves have given place to the rooms of Sadhus in their own Gurudwaras and Mutts. One has of necessity to suit himself to time and place; and change of place and situation should not be allowed to make such a difference in our mental attitudes. Chaturmas begins from the Vyasa Purnima Day when, according to our Shastras, we are expected to worship Vyasa and the Brahmavidya Gurus and begin the study of the *Brahma Sutras* and other ancient books on 'wisdom'.

Our mythology speaks of many Vyasas; and it is said that there had been twenty-eight Vyasas before the present Vyasa—Krishna Dvaipayana—took his birth at the end of Dvapara Yuga. Krishna Dvaipayana was born of Parasara Rishi through the Matsyakanya—Satyavathi Devi—under some peculiar and wonderful circumstances. Parasara was a great Jnani and one of the supreme authorities on astrology and his book *Parasara Hora* is still a textbook on astrology. He has also written a Smriti known as *Parasara Smriti* which is held in such high esteem that it is quoted by our present-day writers on sociology and ethics. Parasara came to know that a child, conceived at a particular Ghatika or moment of time, would be born as the greatest man of the age, nay, as an Amsa of Lord Vishnu Himself. On that day, Parasara was travelling in a boat and he spoke to the boatman about the nearing of that auspicious time. The boatman had a daughter who was of age and awaiting marriage. He was impressed with the sanctity and greatness of the Rishi and offered his daughter in marriage to Parasara. Our Vyasa was born of this union and his birth is said to be due to the blessing of Lord Siva Himself who blessed the union of a sage with a Jnani of the highest order, although of a low caste.

At a very tender age Vyasa gave out to his parents the secret of his life that he should go to the forest and do Akhanda Tapas. His mother at first did not agree, but later gave permission on one important condition that he should appear before her whenever she wished for his presence. This itself shows how far-sighted the parents and the son were. Puranas say that Vyasa took initiation at the hands of his twenty-first Guru, sage Vasudeva. He studied the Shastras under sages Sanaka and Sanandana and others. He arranged the Vedas for the good of mankind and wrote the *Brahma Sutras* for the quick and easy understanding of the Srutis; he also wrote the Mahabharata to enable women, Sudras and other people of lesser intellect to understand the highest knowledge in the easiest way. Vyasa wrote the eighteen Puranas and established the system of teaching them through Upakhyanas or discourses. In this way, he established the three paths, viz., Karma, Upasana and Jnana. To him is also attributed the fact that he continued the line of his mother and that Dhritarashtra, Pandu and Vidura were his progeny. Vyasa's last work was the Bhagavata which he undertook at the instigation of Devarshi Narada who once came to him and advised him to write it as, without it, his goal in life would not be reached.

Vyasa is considered by all Hindus as a Chiranjivi, one who is still living and roaming throughout the world for the well-being of his devotees. It is said that he appears to the true and the faithful and that Jagadguru Sankaracharya had his Darshan in the house of sage Mandana Misra and that he appeared to many others as well. Thus, in short, Vyasa lives for the welfare of the world. Let us pray for his blessings on us all and on the whole world.

Everybody knows that there are six important systems of thought developed by our ancients known as the Shad Darshanas or the six orthodox schools of philosophy, viz., Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaiseshika, Purva Mimamsa and Uttara

Mimamsa or Vedanta. Each system has a different shade of opinion. Later, these thoughts became unwieldy, and to regulate them, the *Sutras* came into existence. Treatises were written in short aphorisms, called "*Sutras*" in Sanskrit, meaning clues for memory or aids to long discussions on every topic. In the Padma Purana, the definition of a *Sutra* is given. It says that a *Sutra* should be concise and unambiguous; but the brevity was carried to such an extent that the *Sutra* has become unintelligible and particularly so in the *Brahma Sutras*. Today we find the same *Sutra* being interpreted in a dozen ways. The *Brahma Sutras* written by Vyasa or Badarayana—for that was the name which he possessed in addition—are also known as *Vedanta Sutras* as they deal with Vedanta only. They are divided into four chapters, each chapter being subdivided again into four sections. It is interesting to note that they begin and end with *Sutras* which read together mean "the inquiry into the real nature of Brahman has no return", meaning that "going by that way one reaches Immortality and no more returns to the world". About the authorship of these *Sutras*, tradition attributes it to Vyasa. Sankaracharya, in his Bhashya, refers to Vyasa as the author of the Gita and the Mahabharata, and to Badarayana as the author of the *Brahma Sutras*. His followers—Vachaspathi, Anandagiri and others—identify the two as one and the same person, while Ramanuja and others attribute the authorship of all three to Vyasa himself. The oldest commentary on the *Brahma Sutras* is by Sankaracharya; he was later followed by Ramanuja, Vallabha, Nimbarka, Madhva and others who established their own schools of thought. All the five Acharyas mostly agree on two points, viz., (i) that Brahman is the cause of this world and (ii) that knowledge of Brahman leads to final emancipation. But they differ amongst themselves on the nature of this Brahman, the relation between the individual soul and the Supreme Soul, and the condition of the soul in the state of release. According to some, Bhakti and not Jnana, as interpreted by Sankara, is the chief means of attaining liberation.

Vyasa's life is a unique example of one born for the dissemination of spiritual knowledge. His writings inspire us and the whole world even to this day. May we all live in the spirit of his writings!

SAGE YAJNAVALKYA

The name of Yajnavalkya of Mithila stands distinguished both in the Srutis and in the Smritis. Yajnavalkya is especially known for his unsurpassed spiritual wisdom and power. The seer of a Veda Samhita from Bhagavan Surya, the revealer of Brahma Jnana to Janaka, Maitreyi and others, Yajnavalkya hails supreme among sages of sacred memory. As to his obtaining the Shukla Yajurveda Samhita from Bhagavan Surya, there is the following history.

Yajnavalkya was the son of the sister of Mahamuni Vaishampayana, the Vedacharya of the Taittiriya section. He was studying the Taittiriya Samhita from Vaishampayana who was also his Guru. Vaishampayana had many other disciples too and they all were students of the Taittiriya Shakha.

Once all the Rishis decided to form an association near the Meru mountain and made a rule that any Rishi who absented himself at the appointed hour should incur the sin of Brahmahatya (the sin of killing a Brahmin) for seven days. On that appointed day fell the Sraddha ceremony of Vaishampayana's father. Vaishampayana thought, "Somehow I have to perform my father's ceremony. If the sin of *Brahmahatya* comes to me, my disciples will observe the expiatory penance therefor". So Vaishampayana did not attend the meeting of the Rishis. And accordingly he incurred the sin of *Brahmahatya*.

Then Vaishampayana said to his disciples, "Now I have to expiate this great sin of *Brahmahatya*. Therefore, you all will observe, for my sake, an expiatory penance for seven days".

At once Yajnavalkya stood up and said, "O Guru! All these are poor-spirited young students. They will not be able to undergo such a hard penance. So, instead of all, I myself alone shall observe it in the manner in which nobody else can". Vaishampayana told Yajnavalkya not to undertake it alone. But Yajnavalkya persisted. The preceptor was offended at this audacious attitude of the disciple and said, "O proud one, you are very conceited. You get away from me. Enough of you who is disposed to despise wise Brahmins. Give back to me immediately whatever you have learnt from me".

Upon the order of the Guru, Yajnavalkya, the son of Devarata, vomited out the collection of the Yajus in the form of food. The other disciples ate that food taking the form of the Tittiri birds, because they were very eager to receive the same. They then had the direct revelation of those Yajurveda collections. As the Tittiri birds ate this Veda, it is thenceforth called the Taittiriya Yajurveda. It is also known as Krishna (black) Yajurveda on account of its being vomited substance.

Then Yajnavalkya determined not to have any human Guru thereafter. Thus he began to propitiate the Sun-God, Surya. Yajnavalkya worshipped and extolled the Sun, the master of the Vedas, for the purpose of acquiring the fresh Vedic portions not known to his preceptor, Vaishampayana.

Yajnavalkya said, "Prostration to the glorious Aditya, who in the form of the Atman, abides in all beings. I bow to Him who surrounds all like Akasa, who is one and not separated or distanced by limiting conditions. O Great God, O Creator, I contemplate upon that glowing sphere which lights and warms the whole world! O God who burns all miseries wrought by unrighteous activities, who burns ignorance which is the seed of activity! O Lord, I worship Thy lotus-like feet praised and worshipped by the rulers of the three worlds. Give me those portions of the Veda which are not known to others".

The Sun-God, the glorious Lord Hari, pleased with Yajnavalkya's penance, assumed the form of a horse and taught the sage such fresh portions of the Yajurveda as were not known to any other. This portion of the Yajurveda goes by the name of Shukla Yajurveda. It is also known as Vajasaneya Yajurveda, because it was evolved in great rapidity by Surya in the form of a horse through his manes. Yajnavalkya divided this Vajasaneya Yajurveda again into fifteen branches, each branch comprising hundreds of Yajus Mantras. Kanva, Madhyandina and others learnt those branches.

Yajnavalkya married two wives. One was Maitreyi and the other Katyayani. Of the two, Maitreyi was a Brahmavadini. When Yajnavalkya wished to divide his property between the two wives before starting for the fourth Ashrama of his life, Maitreyi asked whether she could become immortal through wealth. Yajnavalkya replied that there was no hope of immortality through wealth and that she would only become one among the many who were well-to-do on earth. On hearing this, Maitreyi requested Yajnavalkya to teach her what he considered as the best. Then Yajnavalkya elaborately described to her the sole greatness of the Absolute Self, the nature of Its existence, the way of attaining infinite knowledge and immortality, etc. This immortal conversation between Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi is recorded in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. The central theme of the discourse is this: "All things are dear, not for their sake, but for the sake of the Self. This Self alone exists everywhere. It cannot be understood or known, for It alone is the Understander and the Knower. Its nature cannot be said to be positively as such. It is realised through endless denials as 'not this, not this'. The Self is self-luminous, indestructible, unthinkable".

The other wife Katyayani, the daughter of Bharadhwaja, was of common intelligence, and through her Yajnavalkya had three sons—Chandrakanta, Mahamegha and Vijaya.

Yajnavalkya, though a great Brahmajnani, was a great Karmakandi too. He caused many Yajnas to be performed and himself became the Acharya of those great Yajnas. He was a celebrated Srotriya and a Brahma-nishtha Guru. Once King Janaka of Videha wanted to know from which real Brahmanishtha to receive Brahma Vidya. In order to find out who was the real Brahma-nishtha, Janaka performed a huge *Bahudakshina* sacrifice to which all the Rishis from far and wide were invited. And he offered one thousand cows with their calves, all their horns being decked with enormous gold. Then he proclaimed to the assembled ones, "Whosoever is the best Brahmana amongst you may drive these cows home". None dared to get up and take away the cows as they were afraid of censure by the others. But Yajnavalkya stood up and asked his disciple Samasravas to drive the cows home.

The other Brahmanas got angry at this and said to one another, "How can he declare himself to be the best among us?". Thereupon several Rishis challenged Yajnavalkya with many questions on transcendental matters to all of which Yajnavalkya gave prompt reply. There was a great debate in which Yajnavalkya won over all the others. Janaka was convinced that Yajnavalkya was the best Brahma-nishtha and received Brahma Vidya from him thereafter.

The third and the fourth chapters of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad abound with the great philosophical teachings of Yajnavalkya. Yajnavalkya was also the author of the famous *Yajnavalkya Smriti.* His other works are *Yajnavalkya Shakha, Pratijna Sutra, Satapatha Brahmana,* and *Yoga-Yajnavalkya.*

At the sacrifice of Janaka, there was an exchange of words between Yajnavalkya and Vaishampayana. But on hearing that Yajnavalkya had obtained a fresh Veda from the Sun-God, Vaishampayana was much pleased and he requested Yajnavalkya to teach that Veda to his own disciples also. Yajnavalkya consented and taught his Veda to the disciples of Vaishampayana.

In the end, Yajnavalkya took Vidvat Sannyasa and retired to the forest.

Yajnavalkya was one of the greatest sages ever known. We find him arguing with and overcoming even his teacher Uddalaka at the court of Janaka. His precepts as contained in the Upanishads stand foremost as the crest-jewel of the highest teachings on Brahma Vidya.

YOGI BHUSANDA

Yogi Bhusanda is one of the Chiranjivis amongst Yogins. He was a master of the science of Pranayama. It is said that a big nest, like a mountain, was built by him on the southern branch of the Kalpa Vriksha, situated at the northern summit of the Mahameru. Bhusanda lived in that nest. He was a Trikala Jnani. He could sit in Samadhi for any length of time. He was desireless. He had obtained supreme Shanti and Jnana. He was there enjoying the bliss of his own Self and he is still there, being a Chiranjivi.

Bhusanda had the full knowledge of the five Dharanas. He had rendered himself proof against the five elements by practising the five methods of concentration.

It is said that when all the twelve Adityas scorch the world with their burning rays, Yogi Bhusanda would, through his Apas Dharana, reach up the Akasa. When the fierce gaps arise splintering up the rocks to pieces, he would be in the Akasa through Agni Dharana. When the world, together with the Mahameru, would be under water, he would float on the water through Vayu Dharana.

DATTATREYA

Anasuya is generally quoted as the model of chastity. She was the wife of Atri Maharishi, a great sage and one of the Sapta Rishis. She was well established in Pativrata Dharma. She served her husband with intense devotion. She did severe Tapas for a very long time in order to beget sons equal to Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.

Once Narada took a small ball of iron—the size of a gram-grain—to Sarasvati and said to her, "O Sarasvati Devi! Please fry this iron ball. I will eat this iron-ball-gram during my travel". Sarasvati laughed and said, "O Rishi Narada! How can this iron ball be fried? How can this be eaten?". Narada afterwards went to Mahalakshmi and Parvati and requested them to fry the iron ball. They also laughed at Narada Rishi. Then Narada said, "O Devis! See, I will get it fried by Anasuya, wife of Atri Maharishi, a great Pativrata who lives in the earth-plane".

Then Narada came to Anasuya and requested her to fry the iron-ball-gram. Anasuya put the iron ball in the frying pan, meditated on the form of her husband and put a few drops of water which were used in washing the feet of her husband on the iron ball. The iron ball was at once fried. Narada went to Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati, ate before them the fried iron-ball-gram and gave them also a little of it. He greatly praised the glory of Anasuya and her chastity. Then Narada resolved to fulfil the wish of Anasuya to beget sons equal to Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.

Narada said to Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati: "You also could have fried the iron ball, if you all had done service to your husbands with faith, sincerity and devotion. Make a request to your husbands to test Anasuya's Pativrata Dharma".

Then Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati requested their husbands to test the Pativrata Dharma of Anasuya, wife of Atri

Maharishi, and ask her to give them Nirvana Bhiksha, that is, to give them alms in a naked condition.

The Tri-Murtis, through Jnana-Drishti, came to know of the action of Narada and the Tapas and the wish of Anasuya. They agreed. The Tri-Murtis put on the garb of Sannyasins, appeared before Anasuya and asked her to give them Nirvana Bhiksha. Anasuya was in a great dilemma. She could not say 'No' to the Bhikshus. She had to maintain her Pativrata Dharma also. She meditated on the form of her husband, took refuge in his feet and sprinkled over the three Sannyasins a few drops of water which were used for washing the feet of her husband. The Tri-Murtis were converted into three children on account of the glory of the Charanamrita. At the same time, there was accumulation of milk in the breast of Anasuya. She thought that those children were her own children and fed them with the milk in a nude state and put them to the cradle. She was eagerly expecting the arrival of her husband who had gone for taking his bath.

As soon as Atri Rishi came back home, Anasuya related to him all that had happened during his absence, placed the three children at his feet and worshipped him. But Atri knew all this already through his divine vision. He embraced all the three children. The three children became one child with two feet, one trunk, three heads and six hands. Atri Rishi blessed his wife and informed her that the Tri-Murtis themselves had assumed the forms of the three children to gratify her wish.

Narada went to Brahma-Loka, Vaikuntha and Kailasa and informed Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati that their husbands had been turned into children through the power of the Pativrata Dharma of Anasuya when they asked her Nirvana Bhiksha and that they would not return unless the Devis asked for Bhartri Bhiksha (Bhiksha of husband) from Atri. Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati assumed the forms of ordinary women, appeared before Atri and asked for Pati Bhiksha: "O Rishi, kindly give us back our husbands". Atri Rishi duly honoured the three ladies and with folded hands prayed to them that his wish and the wish of Anasuya should be fulfilled. Then the Tri-Murtis appeared in their true form before Atri and said, "This child will be a great sage according to your word and will be equal to us according to the wish of Anasuya. This child will bear the name of Dattatreya". Then they disappeared.

Dattatreya attained manhood. As he had the rays of the Tri-Murtis, and as he was a great Jnani, all the Rishis and ascetics worshipped him. He was gentle, peaceful and amiable. He was always followed by a great multitude of people. Dattatreya tried to get rid of them, but his endeavours were all in vain. Once when he was surrounded by many people, he entered a river for bathing and he did not come out of it for three days. He entered into Samadhi inside the water. On the third day, he came out and found that the people were still sitting on the banks of the river awaiting his return. He did not succeed in getting rid of the people by this method.

So Dattatreya adopted another plan. He created a beautiful girl and a bottle of wine out of his Yogic power. He came out of the waters holding the girl in one hand and the bottle of wine in the other. The people thought that Dattatreya had fallen from his Yoga and so they left him and went away.

Dattatreya threw away all his personal possessions, even the scanty clothing he had, and became an Avadhuta. He went out preaching and teaching the truths of Vedanta. Dattatreya taught his Gita, named Avadhuta Gita, to Lord Subrahmanya. This is a most valuable book which contains the truths and secrets of Vedanta and the direct experiences of Self-realisation.

Once, while Dattatreya was roaming in a forest happily, he met king Yadu, who on seeing Dattatreya so happy, asked him the secrets of his happiness and also the name of his Guru. Dattatreya said that the Atma alone was his Guru and yet he had learned wisdom from twenty-four individuals and that they were therefore his Gurus.

Dattatreya then mentioned the names of his twenty-four Gurus and spoke of the wisdom that he had learnt from each.

Dattatreya said: "The names of my twenty-four teachers are:—

1. Earth
2. Water
3. Air
4. Fire
5. Sky
6. Moon
7. Sun
8. Pigeon
9. Python
10. Ocean
11. Moth
12. Honey-gatherer
13. Bee
14. Elephant
15. Deer
16. Fish
17. Dancing girl Pingala
18. Raven
19. Child
20. Maiden
21. Serpent
22. Arrow-maker
23. Spider
24. Beetle

1. I have learnt patience and doing good to others from the *earth*, for it endures every injury that man commits on its surface and yet it does him good by producing crops, trees, etc.

2. From *water* I have learnt the quality of purity. Just as the pure water cleanses others, so also the sage, who is pure and free from selfishness, lust, egoism, anger, greed, etc., purifies all those who come in contact with him.

3. The *air* is always moving through various objects, but it never gets attached to anyone of them; so I have learnt from the air to be without attachment, though I move with many people in this world.

4. Just as *fire* burns bright, so also the sage should be glowing with the splendour of his knowledge and Tapas.

5. The air, the stars, the clouds, etc., are all contained in the *sky*, but the sky does not come in contact with any of them. I have learnt from the sky that the Atma is all-pervading and yet it has no contact with any object.

6. The *moon* is in itself always complete, but appears to decrease or increase, on account of the varying shadow of the earth upon the moon. I have learnt from this that the Atma is always perfect and changeless and that it is only the Upadhis or limiting adjuncts that cast shadows upon it.

7. Just as the *sun*, reflected in various pots of water, appears as so many different reflections, so also, Brahman appears different because of the Upadhis (bodies) caused by its reflection through the mind. This is the lesson I have learnt from the sun.

8. I once saw a pair of *pigeons* with their young birds. A fowler spread a net and caught the young birds. The mother pigeon was very much attached to her children. She did not care to live, so she fell into the net and was caught. The male pigeon was attached to the female pigeon, so he also fell into the net and was caught. From this I learnt that attachment was the cause of bondage.

9. The *python* does not move about for its food. It remains contented with whatever it gets and lies in one place. From this I have learnt to be unmindful of food and to be contented with whatever I get to eat (Ajahara Vritti).

10. Just as the *ocean* remains unmoved even though hundreds of rivers fall into it, so also, the wise man should remain unmoved among all sorts of temptations, difficulties and troubles. This is the lesson I have learnt from the ocean.

11. Just as the *moth*, being enamoured of the brilliance of the fire, falls into it and is burnt up, so also, a passionate man who falls in love with a beautiful girl comes to grief. To control the sense of sight and to fix the mind on the Self is the lesson I have learnt from the moth.

12. Just as *black bee* sucks the honey from different flowers and does not suck it from only one flower, so also I take only a little food from one house and a little from another house and thus appease my hunger (Madhukari Bhiksha or Madhukari Vritti). I am not a burden on the householder.

13. *Bees* collect honey with great trouble, but a hunter comes and takes the honey easily. Even so, people hoard up wealth and other things with great difficulty, but they have to leave them all at once and depart when the Lord of Death takes hold of them. From this I have learnt the lesson that it is useless to hoard things.

14. The male *elephant*, blinded by lust, falls into a pit covered over with grass, even at the sight of a paper-made female elephant. It gets caught, enchained and tortured by the goad. Even so, passionate men fall in the traps of women and come to grief. Therefore, one should destroy lust. This is the lesson I have learnt from the elephant.

15. The *deer* is enticed and trapped by the hunter through its love of music. Even so, a man is attracted by the music of women of loose character and brought to destruction. One should never listen to lewd songs. This is the lesson I have learnt from the deer.

16. Just as a *fish* that is covetous of food falls an easy victim to the bait, so also, the man who is greedy of food, who allows his sense of taste to overpower him, loses his independence and easily gets ruined. The greed for food must therefore be destroyed. It is the lesson that I have learnt from the fish.

17. There was a *dancing girl* named Pingala in the town of Videha. She was tired of looking out for customers one night. She became hopeless. Then she decided to remain content with what she had and then she had sound sleep. I have learnt from that fallen woman the lesson that the abandonment of hope leads to contentment.

18. A *raven* picked up a piece of flesh. It was pursued and beaten by other birds. It dropped the piece of flesh and attained peace and rest. From this I have learnt the lesson that a man in the world undergoes all sorts of troubles and miseries when he runs after sensual pleasures and that he becomes as happy as the bird when he abandons the sensual pleasures.

19. The *child* who sucks milk is free from all cares, worries and anxieties, and is always cheerful. I have learnt the virtue of cheerfulness from the child.

20. The parents of a *young girl* had gone in search of a proper bridegroom for her. The girl was alone in the house. During the absence of the parents, a party of people came to the house to see her on a similar mission. She received the party herself. She went inside to husk the paddy. While she was husking, the glass bangles on both hands made a tremendous jingling noise. The wise girl reflected thus: “The party will detect, by the noise of the bangles, that I am husking the paddy myself and that my family is too poor to engage others to get the work done. Let me break all my bangles except two on each hand”. Accordingly, she broke all the bangles except two on each

hand. Even those two bangles created much noise. She broke one more bangle in each hand. There was no further noise though she continued husking. I have learnt from the girl's experience the following:—Living among many would create discord, disturbance, dispute and quarrel. Even among two persons, there might be unnecessary words or strife. The ascetic or the Sannyasin should remain alone in solitude.

21. A *serpent* does not build its hole. It dwells in the holes dug out by others. Even so, an ascetic or a Sannyasin should not build a home for himself. He should live in the caves and temples built by others. This is the lesson that I have learnt from the snake.

22. The mind of an *arrow-maker* was once wholly engrossed in sharpening and straightening an arrow. While he was thus engaged, a king passed before his shop with his whole retinue. After some time, a man came to the artisan and asked him whether the king had passed by his shop. The artisan replied that he had not noticed anything. The fact was that the artisan's mind had been so solely absorbed in his work that he had not known the king's passing before his shop. I have learnt from the artisan the quality of intense concentration of mind.

23. The *spider* pours out of its mouth long threads and weaves them into cobwebs. It gets itself entangled in the net of its own making. Even so, man makes a net of his own ideas and gets entangled in it. The wise man should therefore abandon all worldly thoughts and think of Brahman only. This is the lesson I have learnt from the spider.

24. The Bhringi or the *beetle* catches hold of a worm, puts it in its nest and gives it a sting. The poor worm, always fearing the return of the beetle and the sting, and thinking constantly of the beetle, becomes a beetle itself. Whatever form a man constantly thinks of, he attains in course of time. As a man thinks, so he becomes. I have learnt from the beetle and the worm to turn myself into Atma by contemplating constantly on It and thus to give up all attachment to the body and attain Moksha or liberation".

King Yadu was highly impressed by the teachings of

Dattatreya. He abandoned the world and practised constant meditation on the Self.

Dattatreya was absolutely free from intolerance or prejudice of any kind. He learnt wisdom from whatever source it came. All seekers after wisdom should follow the example of Dattatreya.

YOGI JAIGISAVYA

There was a great Yogi by name Jaigisavya. He had full knowledge of all his previous births continuously through ten Maha-Pralayas. Rishi Avatya approached Jaigisavya and said to him, "You have experienced the troubles of life in hell, among animals, and in wombs. You have been born again and again among men and gods. What are your experiences of pain in hells? What are your experiences of pleasure in heaven? Which is greater, pleasure or pain, in human birth?".

Yogi Jaigisavya gave the following answer: "I have lived through ten Maha-Kalpas. I have experienced the troubles of hells and animal life. I have been born again and again among men and gods. There is no pleasure at all in anything anywhere—in this world or in heaven. I consider all that I have experienced as pain only".

Avatya again questioned: "Oh Yogi, do you think that the joy and contentment obtained during the state of Prakritilaya also comes under the category of pain?".

Yogi Jaigisavya replied: "The joy of Prakritilaya is no doubt superior to the sensual pleasure that is derived from objects, but it is only pain when compared to the pure bliss of absolute freedom or Kaivalya. The joy of Prakritilaya is an effect of Guna only. There is still the thread of desire or Trishnatantu there. When the Yogi becomes absolutely desireless, then only comes pure, unalloyed, infinite and eternal bliss".

THIRUMULA NAYANAR

Thirumula Nayanar was a great Yogi in Kailas. He had all the eight major Siddhis through the grace of Nandi, the Vahana of Lord Siva. He was a friend of Agastya Muni. He came down from Kailas and stayed in Kashi. Then he went to Chidambaram and Thiruvavaduthurai and other places near Madras. He worshipped Lord Siva in the temple at Thiruvavaduthurai and stayed there for some time.

Once Thirumula Nayanar went to a garden on the banks of the river Cauvery. There he saw the dead body of a caretaker of a herd of cows. He noticed that all the cows surrounded the dead body of the cowherd and were crying bitterly. This touched the heart of Thirumular. He pitied the cows very much. He left his body in a certain place and entered the dead body of the cowherd. He looked after the cows throughout thc day and sent them back to their respective houses. The wife of the cowherd, who was not aware of the death of her husband, invited Thirumular who was wearing the physical body of her husband. Thirumular refused. He wanted to enter his own body. When he searched for his body, it was not found in its place. Then he thought it was all the grace of Lord Siva. With the body of the cowherd, he went to Aduthurai and sat underneath an Asvattha tree on the western side of the temple and wrote a valuable book called *Thirumantiram* in Tamil. It is a book of three hundred verses which contain the essence of the Vedas.

The Prophets

The Prophets

ZOROASTER

There is no certainty at all about the age in which Zoroaster lived. Some say that Zoroaster lived about 6000 B.C. Others maintain that he flourished in the middle of the seventh century B.C.

Zoroaster was the greatest prophet among the ancient Iranians. He took his birth in order to establish the worship of Ahura Mazda, the Supreme Lord of the Universe and to fulfil the Divine Mission. His own original writings, the precious Gathas in the Avestan language, indicate that he was a God-intoxicated person.

Zoroaster's father was the venerable Porushaspo and his mother Dughdhvo. Zoroaster was born in the west of Iran in Takht-e-Suleman in the district of Azerbaijan. He was a direct descendant in the royal line of the house of Manushcihar, the ancient King of Iran.

The Prophet of Iran is known to his followers as Zarathustra. (Possessor of yellow or old camels. 'Ustra' means camels.)

When the Prophet of Iran was born, nature rejoiced. The trees, rivers and flowers expressed their joy and delight. The demons were frightened. As soon as the child was born, he did not cry like an ordinary mortal. He made a loud laughter. Many angels and archangels came to adore him.

Zoroaster's family name was 'Spitama', which means 'White'. Zoroaster had two elder brothers and two younger brothers.

The birth of Zoroaster was miraculous. The glory of Ahura Mazda descended from heaven and entered the house of the future mother of the prophet. When she was pregnant, archangels came to her and worshipped and praised the unborn child.

Zoroaster married three times and had many children. His first wife had one son and three daughters. The youngest daughter Pourucista married Jamaspa, who was the uncle of Zoroaster's third wife. Zoroaster had two sons by his second wife.

We know very little of the early life of Zoroaster. Even when he was a boy, he showed great wisdom. He argued with wise men and censured the heretics.

Demons and evil spirits tried to kill him. The Turanian King Durasrobo also tried to kill the child, but the life of the prophet was miraculously saved by the all-merciful Lord.

Zoroaster developed dispassion when he attained the age of sixteen. The objects of the world lost all attraction for him. He despised all mundane pleasures. He rose above all sensual cravings. He showed intense love and compassion for all living beings.

Zoroaster left his home at the age of twenty and wandered from place to place. He led a life of purity and righteousness. He roamed about in forests. He lived alone in caves and mountain-tops. He controlled his tongue and subjugated his other senses also. He was very abstemious in his diet. He spent his time in calm meditation.

Zoroaster experienced Samadhi or communion with Ahura Mazda, the Supreme Lord of the Universe, on the top of Mount Sabatam. He had prophetic divine visions. He conversed directly with Ahura Mazda and received the wisdom of the Lord. He received seven revelations from Ahura Mazda. At the age of thirty, he came out as the Prophet of God. After receiving the divine light of revelation, he became the renowned messenger of Ahura Mazda.

Several archangels helped Zoroaster in the spiritual path. Archangels are divine messengers of the highest order. They are the attendants of Ahura Mazda. They correspond to the Siva-Ganas—the attendants of Lord Siva;—and to Jaya, Vijaya, Nanda, Sunanda, etc.—the attendants of Lord Vishnu. They are the guardian-deities or the Lokapalas of the world. Zoroaster had direct conversation with these archangels.

Vohumanah is the archangel of good thought. He is also the presiding Lord of domestic animals. He appeared before Zoroaster and helped him to cast off the physical sheath and directed his soul to the supreme abode of Ahura Mazda. Ahura Mazda Himself gave instructions to the Prophet and imparted divine wisdom to him. Zoroaster obeyed the commands of Ahura Mazda.

When Zoroaster was coming down from the celestial abode of Ahura Mazda, he was terribly attacked by the evil force Ahriman, the Satan of Zoroastrianism. Ahriman wanted to kill Zoroaster, but Zoroaster's spiritual powers saved him. The Prophet became the master of all demons after conquering Ahriman. He began to preach again.

Zoroaster experienced a second vision. The same archangel asked the prophet to take great care of the animals and to protect them.

Then Zoroaster conversed in his third vision with Asha Vahishta, the archangel of righteousness who is the presiding Lord of sacred fires. The archangel commanded Zoroaster to protect the sacred fire and all fires.

Zoroaster conversed with Khehathra Vairya, the archangel of good royalty who is the presiding Lord of metals. The archangel commanded the Prophet to take care of the metals. Then Zoroaster conversed with Spenta Armaith, the archangel of modesty, who is the presiding Lord of earth. Then he conversed with Hauravatat, the archangel of health who is the presiding Lord of the waters. Lastly, he conversed with Ameretat, the archangel of immortality who presides over plants.

Zoroaster had a perfect knowledge of the celestial hierarchy of gods through these visions. *Zend Avesta,* which is the Bible and the Gita of the Parsis, contains the wisdom which the Prophet received from Ahura Mazda, the Supreme Lord.

The divine experiences of Zoroaster are similar to the experiences of Satyakama Jabala of the Chhandogya Upanishad. The Wind-God, the God of Fire, the Sun-God, and Varuna or the presiding Deity of the Waters imparted divine wisdom to Satyakama. Archangel Vahishta is the Fire-God or Agni of the Hindus. Archangel Hauravatat is Varuna of the Hindus.

Zoroaster disliked the Kavis and the Karpans, who were the chiefs of the demon-worshippers. The Karpans were devoted to rites and ceremonies. They were addicted to the use of Homa, the intoxicating drink, in their religious ceremonies. The Prophet tried to convert all the demon-worshippers, the evil men and women and their chiefs, viz., the Kavis and the Karpans. The Kavis and the Karpans were the priests. Naturally, all orthodox priests are opponents of broad reforms. Zoroaster failed in his attempt.

Zoroaster travelled from place to place. He went to India and China, but no one received his message in the beginning. He first converted his own cousin Maidhyoi-madnha. This disciple remained faithful to Zoroaster till the end of his life.

The Kavis and the Karpans, the learned priests of the courts, poisoned the ears of Vishtasp, the Sovereign of Iran. They intrigued against the Prophet and accused him before the king of being a sorceror. They persuaded the king to put him in prison to die of starvation. Zoroaster remained in the prison for sometime and was saved by the Lord.

The favourite black horse of the king fell ill. Its four legs were drawn up into its belly. Zoroaster sent word to the king that he would cure the horse. He imposed four conditions, which the king readily accepted. Vishtasp had to accept the new faith. He had to consent that his son Isfendiar would defend the new faith. Zoroaster was to be allowed to convert Queen Hutaosa. The king had to reveal the names of all those who had plotted against Zoroaster and punish them. When each leg of the horse came out, each of the four conditions was granted by the king.

The king, in turn, demanded that four conditions of his should be accepted by Zoroaster. First, the king wanted to know his final destiny and his place in heaven; second, he wanted that his body might become invulnerable; third, he desired that he might have universal knowledge; and lastly, the king wished that his soul might not leave his body until the resurrection. Three archangels appeared before the king and the queen and dazzled their eyes. The king and the queen trembled at their sight. They heard the voice from the light which said that they had come at the command of the Lord to show the king and the queen the glory of the religion of Zoroaster.

King Vishtasp was convinced. He was also convinced of the supernatural powers of the Prophet. He fell at the feet of Zoroaster, accepted his creed and worshipped him as the Prophet of Iran. He experienced a glimpse of heaven. The archangel Ashavahishta gave the king nectar to drink. The queen and other chieftains, and also the brother of the king, and Frashaoshtra, the father-in-law of Zoroaster, became devoted followers of Zoroastrianism. The new faith spread far and wide with the help of the royal patron. The masses also accepted the new faith. Zoroastrianism became the religion of the Iranian Kingdom.

The success of the new religion became the cause for two bitter religious wars between Iran and Turan. Zarir, the brother of King Vishtasp and the king himself defeated the enemies. Zarir played a wonderful part. He was a formidable hero in the war. His gallantry was beyond description. But he was treacherously slain by a poisoned spear hurled from behind by Vidrasfsh. Aryasp, the Turanian king, promised to give his daughter in marriage to Vidrasfsh for doing this horrible, ignominous act.

Bastwar, the young son of Zarir, a mighty hero, who might be called a *Maharatha*, who was equal in strength to Bhishma, killed Vidrasfsh and defeated Aryasp.

King Aryasp again invaded Iran eighteen years after his defeat. He destroyed the temples, killed the priests and burnt the *Zend Avesta*. In the second war, the hero was Ispendiar, the son of King Vishtasp. He defeated Aryasp, drove him out of Iran and killed him.

The Prophet of Iran was praying before the altar in the temple of Nush-Adar with a rosary in his hand. A Turanian, Bratrok-resh by name, killed the prophet with his sword.

Zoroaster threw his rosary at Bratrok-resh. A fire proceeded from the rosary. It fell on Bratrok-resh and destroyed him. Zoroaster died at the age of seventy-seven. Thus the glorious Prophet of Iran, the great messenger of Ahura Mazda and the founder of Zoroastrianism or the religion of Mazda-worship passed away.

Zoroaster did many miracles. He carried out the behests of the angels. He protected the fires and the cattle. He healed the sick and restored the sight of a blind man. He had a great reputation as a scholar and physician. He established many fire-temples. He spread the new faith all over the country. He suppressed the worship of demons, witchcraft and sorcery. He drove pestilence and removed national calamities and disasters. He cured diseases, counteracted the noxious creatures and brought abundant rain on earth.

Zoroaster was pious, noble and compassionate. His message was the noble message of high moral life which paves the way for the attainment of immortality and eternal bliss and the doctrine of the God of Righteousness or Ahura Mazda. "Love the righteous. Have compassion for the distressed."—These constitute Zoroaster's main ethical teachings.

PARSVANATHA

Parsva is regarded as an incarnation of Indra. He was the son of King Visvasena of Kashi, a descendant of the Ikshvaku family, and Queen Bama Devi, daughter of King Mahipala. He was the twenty-third Tirthankara. He was born on the eleventh day of the dark fortnight in the month of Pousha in the year 872 B.C.

Parsvanatha began to practise the twelve vows of a householder when he was only eight years old.

Prince Parsva was now sixteen years old. He was sitting on the throne. His father Visvasena said, "My son, in order to continue our celebrated royal dynasty, you must marry now. At the desire of Nabhi Raja, Rishabha had to marry".

Parsvanatha was very much frightened when he heard the words of his father. He said, "My life-period will not be so extensive as that of Rishabha. I am to live only a few score years. I have already wasted sixteen years in boyish sports. I must enter the order in my thirtieth year. Should I then have a married life for so short a period in the hope of getting pleasures which are, after all, only imperfect, transient and illusory?".

Parsvanatha's heart was filled with a spirit of renunciation. He reflected within himself: "For long, long years I enjoyed the status of Indra and yet the lust for pleasures did not decrease. Enjoyment of pleasures only increases the lust for pleasures, just as the addition of fuel only increases the virulence of fire. Pleasures at the time of enjoyment are pleasant, but their consequences are surely disastrous.

"The soul experiences from beginningless time the sufferings of birth, old age, etc., on account of its attachment to the objects of this world. To satisfy the cravings of his senses, man wanders in the realm of pain. So that he may have sensual gratification, he does not heed the moral injunctions and he commits the worst vices. He kills living animals to enjoy the pleasures of the senses. Lust is at the root of theft, greed, adultery and all vices and crimes.

"As a consequence of sinful acts, the soul is forced to migrate from birth to birth in the kingdom of the lower animals etc., and to suffer the torments of hell. This lust for pleasures must be shunned ruthlessly. So long I have wasted my life. I am not going to spend any more time in the vain pursuit of pleasures. I shall be serious and practise right conduct."

Prince Parsva had the twelve Anupreskshas or meditations. He resolved to abandon the world. He took leave of his parents and then left his house. He retired into the forest. He became absolutely naked. He turned towards the north and bowed to the great Emancipated Siddhas. He plucked five tufts of hair from his head and became a monk.

Parsva practised fasting. He observed with scrupulous care the twenty-eight primary and the ninety-four secondary rules of the order of monks. He was found lost in meditation. He attained the pure omniscience. He attained the final liberation in the Sammeda Hill which is known today as the Parsvanatha Hill.

Parsvanatha preached in Kashi, Kosi, Kosala, Panchala, Maharashtra, Magadha, Avanti, Malava, Anga and Vanga. Many joined the Jain faith. Parsvanatha spent seventy years in preaching.

Mahavira modified and enlarged what had already been taught by Parsvanatha. He did not preach anything which was absolutely new.

Parsvanatha lived for one hundred years. He abandoned his home when he was thirty years old. He left home in 842 B.C. and attained Nirvana in 772 B.C.

Glory to Parsvanatha, the twenty-third Tirthankara!

BUDDHA

In the sixth century before the Christian era, religion was forgotten in India. The lofty teachings of the Vedas were thrown into the background. There was much priestcraft everywhere. The insincere priests traded on religion. They duped the people in a variety of ways and amassed wealth for themselves. They were quite irreligious. In the name of religion, people followed in the footsteps of the cruel priests and performed meaningless rituals. They killed innocent dumb animals and did various sacrifices. The country was in dire need of a reformer of Buddha's type. At such a critical period, when there were cruelty, degeneration and unrighteousness everywhere, reformer Buddha was born to put down priestcraft and animal sacrifices, to save the people and disseminate the message of equality, unity and cosmic love everywhere.

Birth

Buddha's father was Suddhodana, king of the Sakhyas. Buddha's mother was named Maya. Buddha was born in B.C. 560 and died at the age of eighty in B.C. 480. The place of his birth was a grove known as Lumbini, near the city of Kapilavastu, at the foot of Mount Palpa in the Himalayan ranges within Nepal. This small city Kapilavastu stood on the bank of the little river Rohini, some hundred miles north-east of the city of Varanasi. As the time drew nigh for Buddha to enter the world, the gods themselves prepared the way before him with celestial portents and signs. Flowers bloomed and gentle rains fell, although out of season; heavenly music was heard, delicious scents filled the air. The body of the child bore at birth the thirty-two auspicious marks (Mahavyanjana) which indicated his future greatness, besides secondary marks (Anuvyanjana) in large numbers. Maya died seven days after her son's birth. The child was brought up by Maya's sister Mahaprajapati, who became its foster-mother.

Astrologer's prediction

On the birth of the child, Siddhartha, the astrologers predicted to its father Suddhodana: "The child, on attaining manhood, would become either a universal monarch (Chakravarti), or abandoning house and home, would assume the robe of a monk and become a Buddha, a perfectly enlightened soul, for the salvation of mankind". Then the king said: "What shall my son see to make him retire from the world?". The astrologers replied: "Four signs". "What four?" asked the king. "A decrepit old man, a diseased man, a dead man and a monk—these four will make the prince retire from the world" replied the astrologers.

Suddhodana's precaution

Suddhodana thought that he might lose his precious son and tried his level best to make him attached to earthly objects. He surrounded him with all kinds of luxury and indulgence, in order to retain his attachment for pleasures of the senses and prevent him from undertaking a vow of solitariness and poverty. He got him married and put him in a walled place with gardens, fountains, palaces, music, dances, etc. Countless charming young ladies attended on Siddhartha to make him cheerful and happy. In particular, the king wanted to keep away from Siddhartha the 'four signs' which would move him to enter into the ascetic life. "From this time on" said the king, "let no such persons be allowed to come near my son. It will never do for my son to become a Buddha. What I would wish to see is, my son exercising sovereign rule and authority over the four great continents and the two thousand attendant isles, and walking through the heavens surrounded by a retinue thirty-six leagues in circumference". And when he had so spoken, he placed guards for quarter of a league, in each of the four directions, in order that none of the four kinds of men might come within sight of his son.

Renunciation

Buddha's original name was Siddhartha. It meant one who had accomplished his aim. Gautama was Siddhartha's family name. Siddhartha was known all over the world as

Buddha, the Enlightened. He was also known by the name of Sakhya Muni, which meant an ascetic of the Sakhya tribe.

Siddhartha spent his boyhood at Kapialavastu and its vicinity. He was married at the age of sixteen. His wife's name was Yasodhara. Siddhartha had a son named Rahula. At the age of twenty-nine, Siddhartha Gautama suddenly abandoned his home to devote himself entirely to spiritual pursuits and Yogic practices. A mere accident turned him to the path of renunciation. One day he managed, somehow or the other, to get out of the walled enclosure of the palace and roamed about in the town along with his servant Channa to see how the people were getting on. The sight of a decrepit old man, a sick man, a corpse and a monk finally induced Siddhartha to renounce the world. He felt that he also would become a prey to old age, disease and death. Also, he noticed the serenity and the dynamic personality of the monk. And he thought within himself: "Let me also become a monk. Let me go beyond the miseries of this Samsara by renouncing this world of miseries and sorrows. This mundane life, with all its luxuries and comforts, is absolutely worthless. I also am subject to decay and am not free from the effect of old age. Worldly happiness is transitory".

Gautama left for ever his home, wealth, dominion, power, father, wife and the only child. He shaved his head and put on yellow robes. He marched towards Rajgriha, the capital of the kingdom of Magadha. There were many caves in the neighbouring hills. Many hermits lived in those caves. Siddhartha took Alamo Kalamo, a hermit, as his first teacher. He was not satisfied with his instructions. He left him and sought the help of another recluse named Uddako Ramputto for spiritual instructions. At last he determined to undertake Yogic practices. He retired into the forest of Uruvila, the modern Buddha Gaya. He practised severe Tapas and Pranayama for six years. He determined to attain the supreme peace by practising self-mortification. He abstained almost entirely from taking food. He did not find much progress by adopting this method. He was reduced to a skeleton. He became exceedingly weak.

At that moment, some dancing girls were passing that way singing joyfully as they played on their guitar. Buddha heard their song and found real help in it. The song the girls sang had no real deep meaning for them, but for Buddha it was a message full of profound spiritual significance. It was a spiritual pick-me-up to take him out of his despair and infuse power, strength and courage. The song was:

"Fair goes the dancing when the Sitar is tuned,
Tune us the Sitar neither low nor high,
And we will dance away the hearts of men.
The string overstretched breaks, the music dies,
The string overslack is dumb and the music dies,
Tune us the Sitar neither low nor high."

Buddha realised then that he should not go to extremes in torturing the body by starvation and that he should adopt the golden mean or the happy medium or the middle path by avoiding extremes. Then he began to eat food in moderation. He gave up the earlier extreme practices and took to the middle path.

Enlightenment

Once Buddha was in a dejected mood as he did not succeed in his Yogic practices. He knew not where to go and what to do. A village girl noticed his sorrowful face. She approached him and said to him in a polite manner: "Revered sir, may I bring some food for you? It seems you are very hungry". Gautama looked at her and said, "What is your name, my dear sister?". The maiden answered, "Venerable sir, my name is Sujata". Gautama said, "Sujata, I am very hungry. Can you really appease my hunger?".

The innocent Sujata did not understand Gautama. Gautama was spiritually hungry. He was thirsting to attain supreme peace and Self-realisation. He wanted spiritual food. Sujata placed some food before Gautama and entreated him to take it. Gautama smiled and said, "Beloved Sujata, I am highly pleased with your kind and benevolent nature. Can this food appease my hunger?". Sujata replied, "Yes sir, it will appease your hunger. Kindly take it now". Gautama began to eat the food underneath the shadow of a large tree, thenceforth to be called as the great 'Bo-tree' or the tree of wisdom. Gautama sat in a meditative mood underneath the tree from early morning to sunset, with a fiery determination and an iron resolve: "Let me die. Let my body perish. Let my flesh dry up. I will not get up from this seat till I get the full illumination". He plunged himself into deep meditation. At night he entered into deep Samadhi underneath that sacred Bo-tree (Pipal tree or *ficus religiosa)*. He was tempted by Maya in a variety of ways, but he stood adamant. He did not yield to Maya's allurements and temptations. He came out victorious with full illumination. He attained Nirvana. His face shone with divine splendour and effulgence. He got up from his seat and danced in divine ecstasy for seven consecutive days and nights around the sacred Bo-tree. Then he came to the normal plane of consciousness. His heart was filled with profound mercy and compassion. He wanted to share what he had with humanity. He travelled all over India and preached his doctrine and gospel. He became a saviour, deliverer and redeemer.

Buddha gave out the experiences of his Samadhi: "I thus behold my mind released from the defilement of earthly existence, released from the defilement of sensual pleasures, released from the defilement of heresy, released from the defilement of ignorance".

In the emancipated state arose the knowledge: "I am emancipated, rebirth is extinct, the religious walk is accomplished, what had to be done is done, and there is no need for the present existence.

"I have overcome all foes; I am all-wise; I am free from stains in every way; I have left everything and have obtained emancipation by the destruction of desire. Myself having gained knowledge, whom should I call my Master? I have no teacher; no one is equal to me. I am the holy one in this world; I am the highest teacher. I alone am the absolute omniscient one (Sambuddho). I have gained coolness by the extinction of all passion and have obtained Nirvana. To found the kingdom of the law (Dharmo) I go to the city of Varanasi. I will beat the drum of immortality in the darkness of this world".

Lord Buddha then walked on to Varanasi. He entered the 'deer-park' one evening. He gave his discourses there and preached his doctrine. He preached to all without exception, men and women, the high and the low, the ignorant and the learned—all alike. All his first disciples were laymen and two of the very first were women. The first convert was a rich young man named Yasa. The next were Yasa's father, mother and wife. Those were his lay disciples.

Buddha argued and debated with his old disciples who had deserted him when he was in the Uruvila forest. He brought them round by his powerful arguments and persuasive powers. Kondanno, an aged hermit, was converted first. The others also soon accepted the doctrine of Lord Buddha. Buddha made sixty disciples and sent them in different directions to preach his doctrine.

Buddha told his disciples not to enquire into the origin of the world, into the existence and nature of God. He said to them that such investigations were practically useless and likely to distract their minds.

Spreading the doctrine

The number of Buddha's followers gradually increased. Nobles, Brahmins and many wealthy men became his disciples. Buddha paid no attention to caste. The poor and the outcastes were admitted to his order. Those who wanted to become full members of his order were obliged to become monks and to observe strict rules of conduct. Buddha had many lay disciples also. Those lay members had to provide for the wants of the monks.

In the forest of Uruvila, there were three brothers—all very famous monks and philosophers. They had many learned disciples. They were honoured by the kings and potentates. Lord Buddha went to Uruvila and lived with those three monks. He converted those three reputed monks, which caused a great sensation all over the country.

Lord Buddha and his disciples walked on towards Rajgriha, the capital of Magadha. Bimbisara, the king, who was attended upon by 120,000 Brahmins and householders, welcomed Buddha and his followers with great devotion. He heard the sermon of Lord Buddha and at once became his disciple. 110,000 of the Brahmins and householders became full members of Lord Buddha's order and the remaining 10,000 became lay adherents. Buddha's followers were treated with contempt when they went to beg their daily food. Bimbisara made Buddha a present of Veluvanam—a bamboo-grove, one of the royal pleasure-gardens near his capital. Lord Buddha spent many rainy seasons there with his followers.

Every Buddhist monk takes a vow, when he puts on the yellow robe, to abstain from killing any living being. Therefore, a stay in one place during the rainy season becomes necessary. Even now, the Paramahamsa Sannyasins of Sankara's order stay in one place for four months during the rainy season (Chaturmas). It is impossible to move about in the rainy season without killing countless small insects, which the combined influence of moisture and the hot sun at the season brings into existence.

Lord Buddha received from his father a message asking him to visit his native place, so that he might see him once more before he died. Buddha accepted the invitation gladly and started for Kapilavastu. He stayed in a forest outside the city. His father and relatives came to see him, but they were not pleased with their ascetic Gautama. They left the place after a short time. They did not make any arrangement for his and his followers' daily food. After all, they were worldly people. Buddha went to the city and begged his food from door to door. This news reached the ears of his father. He tried to stop Gautama from begging. Gautama said: "O king, I am a mendicant—I am a monk. It is my duty to get alms from door to door. This is the duty of the Order. Why do you stop this? The food that is obtained from alms is very pure". His father did not pay any attention to the words of Gautama. He snatched the bowl from his hand and took him to his palace. All came to pay Buddha their respects, but his wife Yasodhara did not come. She said, "He himself will come to me, if I am of any value in his eyes". She was a very chaste lady endowed with Viveka, Vairagya and other virtuous qualities. From the day she lost her husband she gave up all her luxuries. She took very simple food once daily and slept on a mat. She led a life of severe austerities. Gautama heard all this. He was very much moved. He went at once to see her.

She prostrated at his feet. She caught hold of his feet and burst into tears. Buddha established an order of female ascetics. Yasodhara became the first of the Buddhistic nuns.

Yasodhara pointed out the passing Buddha to her son through a window and said, "O Rahula! That monk is your father. Go to him and ask for your birthright. Tell him boldly, 'I am your son. Give me my heritage' ". Rahula at once went up to Buddha and said, "Dear father, give me my heritage". Buddha was taking his food then. He did not give any reply. The boy repeatedly asked for his heritage. Buddha went to the forest. The boy also silently followed him to the forest. Buddha said to one of his disciples, "I give this boy the precious spiritual wealth I acquired under the sacred Bo-tree. I make him the heir to that wealth". Rahula was initiated into the order of monks. When this news reached the ears of Buddha's father, he was very much grieved because after losing his son, he now lost his grandson also.

Buddha performed some miracles. A savage serpent of great magical power sent forth fire against Buddha. Buddha turned his own body into fire and sent forth flames against the serpent. Once a tree bent down one of its branches in order to help Buddha when he wanted to come up out of the water of a tank. One day five hundred pieces of firewood split by themselves at Buddha's command. Buddha created five hundred vessels with fire burning in them for the Jatilas to warm themselves on a winter night. When there was flood, he caused the water to recede and then he walked over the water.

Ananda, one of Buddha's cousins, was one of the principal early disciples of Buddha and was a most devoted friend and disciple of Buddha. He was devoted to Buddha with a special fervour in a simple childlike way and served him as his personal attendant till the end of his life. He was very popular. He was a very sweet man with pleasant ways. He had no intellectual attainments, but he was a man of great sincerity and loving nature. Devadatta, one of Ananda's brothers, was also in the Order. Devadatta became Buddha's greatest rival and tried hard to oust Buddha and occupy the place himself. A barber named Upali and a countryman called Anuruddha were admitted into the Order. Upali became a distinguished leader of his Order. Anuruddha became a Buddhistic philosopher of vast erudition.

The end

Buddha went to Sravasti, the capital of the kingdom of Kosala. Here a wealthy merchant gave him for residence an extensive and beautiful forest. Buddha spent many rainy seasons there and delivered several grand discourses. Thus Lord Buddha preached his doctrine for over forty-five years travelling from place to place.

Buddha died of an illness brought on by some error in diet. He became ill through eating *Sukara-maddavam*, prepared for him by a lady adherent named Cundo. The commentator explains the word as meaning 'hog's flesh'. Subadhara Bhikshu thinks it means something which wild boars are fond of and says that it has something of the nature of a truffle. Dr. Hoey says that it is not boar's flesh but *Sukarakanda* or hog's root, a bulbous root found chiefly in the jungle and which Hindus eat with great joy. It is a Phalahar that is eaten on days of fasting.

Buddha said to Ananda, "Go Ananda, prepare for me, between twin Sal trees, a couch with the head northward. I am exhausted and would like to lie down". A wonderful scene followed. The twin Sal trees burst into full bloom although it was not the blossoming season. Those flowers fell on the body of Buddha out of reverence. Divine coral tree flowers and divine sandalwood powders fell from above on Buddha's body out of reverence.

Lord Buddha said, "Come now, dear monks. I bid you farewell. Compounds are subject to dissolution. Prosper ye through diligence and work out your salvation".

A few episodes

The spirit of Ahimsa was ever present with Gautama from his very childhood. One day, his cousin Devadatta shot a bird. The poor creature was hurt and fell to the ground. Gautama ran forward, picked it up and refused to hand it over to his cousin. The quarrel was taken up before the Rajaguru who, however, decided in favour of Gautama to the great humiliation of Devadatta.

* * *

In his wanderings, Gautama one day saw a herd of goats and sheep winding their way through a narrow valley. Now and then the herdsman cried and ran forward and backward to keep the members of the fold from going astray. Among the vast flock Gautama saw a little lamb, toiling behind, wounded in one part of the body and made lame by a blow of the herdsman. Gautama's heart was touched and he took it up in his arms and carried it saying, "It is better to relieve the suffering of an innocent being than to sit on the rocks of Olympus or in solitary caves and watch unconcerned the sorrows and sufferings of humanity". Then, turning to the herdsman he said, "Whither are you going, my friend, with this huge flock in so great a hurry?". "To the king's palace" said the herdsman, "We are sent to fetch goats and sheep for sacrifice which our master—the king—will start tonight in propitiation of the gods". Hearing this, Gautama followed the herdsman, carrying the lamb in his arms. When they entered the city, word was circulated that a holy hermit had brought the sacrifices ordered by the king. As Gautama passed through the streets, people came out to see the gracious and saintly figure of the youth clad in the yellow robes of a Sadhu and all were struck with wonder and awe at his noble mien and his sweet expression. The king was also informed of the coming of the holy man to the sacrifice. When the ceremonies commenced in the presence of the king, there was brought a goat ready to be killed and offered to the gods. There it stood with its legs tied up and the high priest ready with a big bloodthirsty knife in his hand to cut the dumb animal's throat. In that cruel and tragic moment, when the life of the poor creature hung by a thread, Gautama stepped forward and cried, "Stop the cruel deed, O king!". And as he said this, he leaned forward and unfastened the bonds of the victim. "Every creature" he said, "loves to live, even as every human being loves to preserve his or her life". The priest then threw the knife away like a repentant sinner and the king issued a royal decree throughout the land the next day, to the effect that no further sacrifice should be made in future and that all people should show mercy to birds and beasts alike.

* * *

Kisagotami, a young woman, was married to the only son of a rich man and they had a male child. The child died when he was two years old. Kisagotami had intense attachment for the child. She clasped the dead child to her bosom, refused to part with it, and went from house to house, to her friends and relatives, asking them to give some medicine to bring the child back to life. A Buddhist monk said to her: "O good girl! I have no medicine. But go to Lord Buddha. He can surely give you a very good medicine. He is an ocean of mercy and love. The child will come back to life. Be not troubled". She at once ran to Buddha and said, "O venerable sir! Can you give any medicine to this child?". Buddha replied, "Yes. I will give you a very good medicine. Bring some mustard seed from some house where no child or husband or wife or father or mother or servant had died". She said, "Very good, sir, I shall bring it in a short time".

Carrying her dead child in her bosom, Kisagotami went to a house and asked for some mustard seed. The people of the house said, "O lady, here is mustard seed. Take it". Kisagotami asked, "In your house, has any son or husband or wife, father or mother or servant, died?". They replied, "O lady! You ask a very strange question. Many have died in our house". Kisagotami went to another house and asked the same. The owner of the house said, "I have lost my eldest son and my wife". She went to a third house. People of the house answered, "We have lost our parents". She went to another house. The lady of the house said, "I lost my husband last year". Ultimately Kisagotami was not able to find a single house where no one had died. Viveka and Vairagya dawned in her mind. She buried the dead body of her child. She began to reflect seriously on the problem of life and death in this world.

Kisagotami then went to Lord Buddha and prostrated at his lotus feet. Buddha said to her, "O good girl! Have you brought the mustard seed?". Kisagotami answered, "I am not able to find a single house where no one has died". Then

Buddha said, "All the objects of this world are perishable and impermanent. This world is full of miseries, troubles and tribulations. Man or woman is troubled by birth, death, disease, old age and pain. We should gain wisdom from experience. We should not expect for things that do not and will not happen. This expectation leads us to unnecessary misery and suffering. One should obtain Nirvana. Then only all sorrows will come to an end. One will attain immortality and eternal peace". Kisagotami then became a disciple of Buddha and entered the Order of Nuns.

* * *

Once Buddha went to the house of a rich Brahmin with bowl in hand. The Brahmin became very angry and said, "O Bhikshu, why do you lead an idle life of wandering and begging? Is this not disgraceful? You have a well-built body. You can work. I plough and sow. I work in the fields and I earn my bread at the sweat of my brow. I lead a laborious life. It would be better if you also plough and sow and then you will have plenty of food to eat". Buddha replied, "O Brahmin! I also plough and sow, and having ploughed and sown, I eat". The Brahmin said, "You say you are an agriculturist. I do not see any sign of it. Where are your plough, bullocks and seeds?". Then Buddha replied, "O Brahmin! Just hear my words with attention. I sow the seed of faith. The good actions that I perform are the rain that waters the seeds. Viveka and Vairagya are the parts of my plough. Righteousness is the handle. Meditation is the goad. Sama and Dama—tranquillity of the mind and restraint of the Indriyas—are the bullocks. Thus I plough the soil of the mind and remove the weeds of doubt, delusion, fear, birth and death. The harvest that comes in is the immortal fruit of Nirvana. All sorrows terminate by this sort of ploughing and harvesting". The rich arrogant Brahmin came to his senses. His eyes were opened. He prostrated at the feet of Buddha and became his lay adherent.

Buddha's teachings

Lord Buddha preached: "We will have to find out the cause of sorrow and the way to escape from it. The desire for sensual enjoyment and clinging to earthly life is the cause of sorrow. If we can eradicate desire, all sorrows and pains will come to an end. We will enjoy Nirvana or eternal peace. Those who follow the Noble Eightfold Path strictly, viz., right opinion, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right employment, right exertion, right thought and right self-concentration will be free from pain and sorrow. This indeed, O mendicants, is that middle course which the Tathagata has thoroughly comprehended, which produces insight, which produces knowledge, which leads to calmness or serenity, to supernatural knowledge, to perfect Buddhahood, to Nirvana.

"This again, indeed, O mendicants, is the noble truth of suffering. Birth is painful, old age is painful, sickness is painful, death is painful, association with unloved objects is painful, separation from loved objects is painful, the desire which one does not obtain, this is too painful—in short, the five elements of attachment to existence are painful. The five elements of attachment to earthly existence are form, sensation, perception, components and consciousness.

"This again, indeed, O mendicants, is the truth of the cause of suffering. It is that thirst which leads to renewed existence, connected with joy and passion, finding joy here and there, namely, thirst for sensual pleasure, and the instinctive thirst for existence. This again, indeed, O mendicants, is the noble truth of cessation of suffering, which is the cessation and total absence of desire for that very thirst, its abandonment, surrender, release from it and non-attachment to it. This again, indeed, O mendicants, is the noble truth of the course which leads to the cessation of suffering. This is verily the Noble Eightfold Path, viz., right opinion, etc."

MAHAVIRA

Mahavira was born in 599 B.C. He lived for 72 years. He abandoned home in 569 B.C. He attained omniscience in 557 B.C. and entered into Nirvana in 527 B.C. He was the last Tirthankara.

Mahavira lived a life of absolute truthfulness, a life of perfect honesty and a life of absolute chastity. He lived without possessing any property at all.

Mahavira was born of Sidhatha, Raja of Kundalpura, and Queen Trisala, who was known by the name Priya Karni. 'Maha' means great and 'Vira' means a hero. 'Tirtha' literally means a ford, a means of crossing over. Metaphorically, it denotes a spiritual guide or philosophy which enables one to cross over the ocean of recurring births in this world. 'Kara' means one who makes. The whole word *Tirthankara* means a Jain holy teacher.

Mahavira is not the founder of Jainism. He revised the Jain doctrines. He was more a reformer than the founder of the faith. In Jain metaphysics, "Time" is divided into cycles. It is claimed that in each half-cycle, twenty-four Tirthankaras, at long intervals, preach anew the doctrines. Mahavira was the twenty-fourth, and like the others, is claimed to have been omniscient.

Mahavira was also known by the names Vardhamana (i.e., ever advancing) and Sanmati. At the age of eight he observed the twelve vows of Ahimsa, etc. He was obedient to his parents and served them with great faith and devotion. He was an able statesman. He did not marry.

Mahavira was immersed in Self-contemplation. He knew that the pleasures of this world were transitory and that they strengthened the fetters of Karma. He knew that renunciation would lead to the attainment of eternal bliss.

People were quite astonished at the virtuous nature of Mahavira at such a tender age. He was very much interested in meditation. He cultivated the arts of music and literature. Thirty years of Prince Vardhamana's life passed off in this way.

Vardhamana saw, through his clairvoyant vision, that he had been passing through innumerable births. He thought, "How many births have gone by fruitlessly! I clearly see that the Soul is essentially separate from the Karma matter. I have still wasted away thirty years of my life. I have not practised any penance. I have not renounced the world in order to attain pure Knowledge. The infatuation which is at the root of all evils is not yet destroyed".

Prince Vardhamana became extremely penitent. He resolved to give up everything worldly. He gave up attachment to his parents, friends and relatives. He thought over the twelve *Anuprekshas* or matters of deep thinking according to the Jain scriptures:

1. All worldly things are temporary.
2. The Soul alone is the sole resort.
3. This world is beginningless and crooked.
4. There is nothing to help the Soul, but the Soul itself.
5. Body, mind, etc., are essentially separate from the Soul.
6. The Soul is essentially pure and the body, etc., are essentially impure.
7. The Soul's bondage is due to the inflow of Karma in it.
8. Every being ought to stop this inflow.
9. Emancipation is attained when Karma is absolutely got rid of.
10. The emancipated Souls remain at the foremost top of the filled spaces.
11. In this world, to have the birth of a human being and to meditate on the nature of the Soul are the greatest blessings.
12. To have the three jewels as described by the Omniscient is the only morality.

Mahavira thought over these twelve things and decided finally that he must abandon home.

Mahavira's mother said, "My beloved son, you will not be able to bear the severity of the austerities. There is time yet for it. You must help your father in governing the kingdom. You can become a monk after some years".

Mahavira said, "Adorable mother! All the objects of the world are evanescent like water bubbles. Where can one get happiness in this world which is the abode of disease, sorrow, pain and death? I must leave this world".

Mahavira distributed all his wealth to the poor with his own hands. He went to the forest. He took off even the piece of cloth which he was wearing and became absolutely nude. He turned to the north and said, "Salutation to the Siddhas!". He rooted out with his own hands five tufts of hair from his head and became a monk.

Mahavira practised rigorous austerities. He fasted for many days. He meditated on the pure nature of the Soul.

Mahavira was tested by the celestials. A group of handsome women surrounded him. But Mahavira remained unmoved and unperturbed. He attained omniscience. He preached his message of peace for thirty years after the attainment of omniscience. He wandered in Magadha, Mithila, etc. Many kings became his disciples.

CONFUCIUS

Confucius was born in 551 B.C. in the feudal State of Lu, a portion of what is now the province of Shangtung on the north-eastern seaboard of China. The name of Confucius in Chinese is Kung-fu-tse, which means “Statesman-philosopher Kung”. The first European scholars who visited China found that name hard to pronounce. So they turned it into Latin and called him Confucius.

There are three religions in China—Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Confucius and Lao-Tze, founder of Taoism, were contemporaries. They were sages and philosophers. They are not regarded as saviours. Lao-Tze was fifty-three years older than Confucius. They met each other. Lao-Tze was 83 years old, more than twice the age of Confucius, when they met. There was much difference in the ideas and beliefs of the two men as there was so much difference in their age. The substance of their conversation has been handed down to us by the Chinese historians. Socrates and Buddha also were the contemporaries of Confucius.

Confucianism is not a religion in the customary sense. It has neither priesthood nor any monastic order. It existed in China long before the time of Confucius. In one of his recorded sayings, Confucius speaks of himself as a ‘transmitter’ and not a maker or originator. Confucius did not give a new religion to the world or a new ethical code. He issued a new and improved edition of the old one. What he gave to the world was only a powerful re-statement of the fundamental principles of human morality or ethics. The moral code he framed was most admirable. It contained grand ethical truths.

Some say that Confucianism is no religion in reality, because Confucius is a philosopher, moralist, statesman and educationist, but no religionist. They say that the thoughts and teachings of Confucius are ethical philosophy, and political and educational principles, but not religious philosophy.

Life of Confucius

Confucius was born in the Kung clan. Confucius' father was Shu-Liang Hih. He was an officer who held an honourable position. He was of unusual stature and extraordinary strength and bravery.

Confucius' father died when Confucius was in his third year. Confucius grew up in stature and in wisdom under the loving guidance and care of his mother. She gave him the best education possible in his days, namely, the study of his nation's history, poetry, philosophy and music.

Confucius visited Logang. Here he studied archaeology, music and the rites and ceremonies. He met here Lao-Tze. When he returned from the capital to Lu, he was acclaimed to be the leading scholar of the State.

Confucius' mother selected a wife for him. Confucius married a girl from the State of Sung. He had a son and two daughters. He named his son Po Yu. We are indebted to the son of Po Yu for the most complete and philosophical account of the teachings of Confucius.

At the age of 17, Confucius completed his education in a modest village school. Then he secured his first employment, the task of keeping the granary accounts for the Chi family in the ducal state of Lu. He was very industrious and honest. He spent his spare time in studying and giving instructions to the boys who played around the grasslands where the cattle were pastured. In this casual way there grew up a band of disciples, who followed Confucius devotedly through his lifetime and made his fame immortal by their records of his teachings. Confucius had a sedate enthusiasm for authority and discipline and a great admiration for the past. Thus his admonitions tended to be ethical rather than religious.

Confucius was tall. He was methodical. He did everything in the proper way, time and place.

Confucius was an eminent ethical teacher with a political aim. His great object was to reform the kingdom by means of the moral principles of ancient times.

In the book "*The Analects*", a collection of sayings, Confucius speaks of himself at different stages of life. "At fifteen, my mind was bent on learning. At thirty, I stood firm. At forty, I was free from doubt or delusion. At fifty, I understood the will of God; I knew the decrees of Heaven. At sixty, my ears were receptive to the truth. At seventy, I could follow the promptings of my heart without transgressing the boundaries of right".

Confucius held the high offices of Minister of Works and Minister of Crime or Chief Justice in his native State. In 501 B.C., in his fiftieth year, he was appointed Governor of Chung Tu district. His administration was very successful. At fifty-one he was Prime Minister.

Confucius produced a marvellous change for good. A thing dropped in the streets was not picked up. People were loyal and had good faith. Women were chaste.

Confucius was the hero of all moral aspiration in China. Confucius was worshipped by the people.

The wonderful achievements of Confucius roused the fear and jealousy of a neighbour, the Marquis of Chi. Confucius was obliged to leave Lu. He became a wanderer from State to State. He thought that one of the princes whom he visited would enable him to put his principles of Government into practice. He was forced to go into exile with some faithful followers for thirteen years. He took to teaching during this period. He gradually attracted a large number of disciples.

Confucius was recalled to his native State, but he refused. He passed away when he was aged 73.

Confucius made a deep study of his country's literature and history. He had a strong conviction that just and righteous rulers only could protect the State and make the people virtuous. His ideal was to create a race of wise rulers like King Janaka. It was with this view that he wandered from State to State in search of a good ruler.

The disciples of Confucius found him free from foregone conclusions, arbitrary determinations, obstinacy and egoism. Confucius would not talk to his disciples about extraordinary things, feats of strength, rebellious disorder and spiritual being. He frequently conversed with them about the books of poetry, history and the rules of propriety. He said to them that there were three things in which the greatest caution was required, viz., fasting as preparatory to sacrifice, going to war and the treatment of disease. He insisted on people cultivating ethics, loyalty and truthfulness. He seldom dwelt on three things, viz., the profitable, the perfect and the decrees of Heaven.

Confucius devoted himself much to the study of things human. He paid great attention to actual life. He never talked much about heaven, natural phenomena, gods, etc. One of his disciples, Chi-Lu, said, "O venerable Master! How can I serve the gods?". Confucius replied, "You do not know how to serve man; yet, how can you ask about serving gods?". The disciple again asked, "Adorable Teacher! Please tell me all about death". Confucius replied, "Beloved Chi-Lu! You do not know much about life; yet, how can you expect to know about death?". But Confucius never denied the existence of heaven or gods.

Confucius devoted himself to the improvement of society. He ever thought of the well-being of society. He tried his level best to contribute much to social welfare. *The Analects*, a collection of the sayings of Confucius, treats mainly of social welfare, human peace and harmony in society.

Confucius strained his every nerve in giving moral training to people. He laid very great emphasis on the cultivation of ethical virtues. He tried to remove the discordant or disturbing elements in society. Confucius had the strong conviction that if the superiors and elders had a blameless character, others would follow them and there would be love and universal peace everywhere. As these social thoughts ever occupied his mind, he had no time to discuss about gods and life after death. Moreover, he did not find it necessary also to dwell on these subjects.

Books

The Analects are conversations of Confucius. They are his discourses with his disciples and the enquirers who came to him. There have been many commentators on *The Analects,* each exemplifying his own school of thought.

The following four books, viz., *Ta Hsueh*, the great learning or learning for adults; *Chung Yung*, the doctrine of the

Mean; *Lun Yu*, the Confucian analects in twenty volumes; and *Meng Tze*, the philosophy of Mencius, are intimately concerned with the principles of Confucianism.

Ta Hsueh is a politico-ethical treatise. *Chung Yung* was written by Kung Chi, a grandson of Confucius. It is purely a philosophical book. It treats of some general principles that concern the nature of man and right conduct. *Lun Yu*, the Confucian analects, contains sayings and conversations between the Teacher and his disciples. *Meng Tze*, the philosophy of Mencius, is written by an ardent Confucianist. It deals with various questions raised by his disciples. It gives advice to the rulers of feudal states. It treats of psychology, political theory and economics.

Sayings of Confucius

Many of the short sayings of Confucius are admirable in their pithiness and sagacity. What could be better than these:—

"Learning without thought is labour lost; thought without learning is perilous."

"It is only the truly virtuous who can love or hate others."

"To be poor without murmuring is difficult; to be rich without being proud is easy."

Some of the sayings of Confucius are indeed somewhat enigmatic. For instance: "Let a good man teach the people seven years and they may then likewise be employed in war." And again: "To lead an uninstructed people to war is to throw them away."

"What the superior man seeks is in himself; what the small man seeks is in others. The superior man is dignified, but does not wrangle; social, but not a partisan. He does not promote a man simply because of his words nor does he put good words aside because of the man."

"The love of virtue should be, like the love of beauty, from an inward constraint."

"Have sufficient self-control even to judge others in comparison with yourself, and to act towards them as you would wish them to act towards you. This is what one may call the 'doctrine of humanity' and there is nothing beyond this."

"The way to become a superior man is to set one's affections on what is right, to love learning, which is the source of knowledge and virtue, with which nothing else can be compared. When righteousness is pursued with sincerity and a mind free from self-deception, the heart becomes rectified."

"Upto this stage, the individual has been busy only with his own improvement; but the cultivation of the person influences primarily those around him, and ultimately, the whole empire. Everyone, therefore, should carefully cultivate his person, having due regard for others besides himself. Each man must guard his words and watch his conduct. He must fly from all that is base and disquieting, and must take benevolence as his dwelling place, righteousness as his road, propriety as his garment, wisdom as his lamp, and faithfulness as his charm. Dignity, reverence, loyalty and faithfulness make up the qualities of a cultivated man. His dignity separates him from the crowd; being reverent, he is beloved; being loyal, he is submitted to; and, being faithful, he is trusted."

The various sayings of Confucius presented the attributes of the superior man. Confucius asked his disciples to admire the superior man, to emulate him. He said that every human being cherished the aspiration to become a superior man, superior to his fellows, superior to his own past and prevailing self.

Given below are some of the attributes of the superior man as enunciated by Confucius.

Purpose:—"The superior man learns in order to attain to the utmost of his principles."

Poise:—"The superior man, in his thought, does not go out of his place."

Self-sufficiency:—"What the superior man seeks is in himself and what the ordinary man seeks is in others".

Earnestness:—"The superior man in everything puts forth his utmost endeavours."

Thoroughness:—"The superior man bends his attention to what is radical. That being established, all practical courses naturally grow up."

Sincerity:—"Is it not his sincerity which distinguishes the superior man?"

Truthfulness:—"What the superior man requires is that in what he says there may be nothing inaccurate."

Purity of thought and action:—"The superior man must be watchful over himself when alone."

Love of truth:—"The superior man is anxious lest he should not get truth; he is not anxious lest poverty comes upon him."

Rectitude:—"The superior man thinks of virtue; the ordinary man thinks of comfort."

Prudence:—"The superior man wishes to be slow in his words and earnest in his conduct."

Composure:—"The superior man may indeed have to endure want, but the ordinary man when he wants, gives way to unbounded licence."

Fearlessness:—"The superior man has neither anxiety nor fear."

Ease and dignity:—"The superior man has dignified ease without pride; the ordinary man has pride without dignified ease."

Firmness:—"Looked at from a distance, the superior man appears stern; when approached, he is mild; when he is heard to speak, his language is firm and decided."

Capacity:—"The superior man cannot be known in little matters, but may be entrusted with great concerns."

Openness:—"The faults of the superior man are like the sun and the moon. He has his faults and all men see them. He changes again and all men look upto him."

Benevolence:—"The superior man seeks to develop the admirable qualities of men and does not seek to develop their evil qualities. The ordinary man does the opposite."

Broad-mindedness:—"The superior man honours talents and virtue and bears with all. He praises the good and pities the incompetent."

Moderation:—"The superior man conforms to the path of the middle course."

Reserve power:—"That wherein the superior man cannot be equalled is simply this, his worth which other men cannot see."

Confucius speaks of the superior or the ideal man thus: "The superior man is catholic and not a partisan. He does what is proper to the position in which he is. He does not wish to go beyond it. He finds himself in no position in which he is not himself.

"The scholar considers honesty and good faith to be his coat of mail and helmet, propriety and righteousness to be his shield and buckler. He walks along, bearing over his head benevolence; he dwells holding righteousness in his arms before him; the government may be violently oppressive, but he does not change his course; such is the way in which he maintains himself."

Teachings

Confucius gave a great impetus to education and learning and the study of rules of right conduct with a view to their practical application. According to his teaching, man's chief end is to know and make the most of himself as a member of society. Confucius preached to his disciples and the people the principles of good life and social harmony.

The teaching of Confucius was largely concerned with the problems of good government. Confucius said, "The ruler himself should be virtuous, just, honest and dutiful. A virtuous ruler is like the Pole-star, which by keeping its place, makes all other stars revolve round it. As is the ruler, so will be the subjects".

What was Confucius' idea of virtue? His word for it was '*Jen*'. The proper understanding of his ethical doctrine chiefly depends on the implications of '*Jen*'. There is no single English equivalent of '*Jen*' in all its shades of meaning. The essence of all the teachings of Confucius may be summed up under this one word '*Jen*'. The nearest equivalent to this difficult word is "social virtue". It is a combination of all those virtues which help to maintain social harmony and peace like benevolence, charity, magnanimity, sincerity, respectfulness, altruism, diligence, loving kindness and goodness.

One of the disciples asked Confucius, "O venerable Master! Please tell me what constitutes social virtue". Confucius replied, "Loving others". Another disciple asked, "Master, is there any one maxim which should be acted upon throughout one's own life?". Confucius replied, "Do not do to others what you do not wish them to do to you". A chief disciple of Confucius said, "The single principle that runs throughout the teachings of my Master is loyalty to oneself and charity to one's neighbour".

Confucius said, "A virtuous man has three awes—awe for Heaven's decree, awe for great men and awe for saints' words. When worshipping God, one must feel as if He were visibly present".

The teaching of Confucius is that the entire world and every being are constantly changing and that the most essential aspect of human life is the present reality.

Confucius held that society was made up of five relationships, viz., those of husband and wife, of parent and child, of elder brother and younger brother, or generally, of elders and youngsters, of ruler and subject, and of friend and friend. A country would be well-governed when all the parties performed their parts aright in these relationships. Confucius said, "There was Tao (a way or road of righteousness) only when fathers were fathers, sons were sons, rulers were rulers and ministers were ministers".

Confucius laid great stress on the cultivation of character, and on purity of heart and conduct. He exhorted the people to develop a good character first, which was a priceless jewel, which was the best of all virtues.

The nature of man, according to Confucius, is fundamentally good or inclined towards goodness. Perfection of goodness can be found only in sages and saints. Every man should attempt to reach the ideal by leading a virtuous life, by possessing a very noble character, and by doing his duty unselfishly with sincerity and truthfulness. He who is endowed with a good character and divine virtues is a Chun-tzu or princely type of man. The princely man sticks to virtue; the inferior man clings to material comfort. The princely man is just; the inferior man expects rewards and favours. The princely man is dignified, noble, magnanimous and humble; the inferior man is mean, proud, crooked and arrogant.

In *"Great Learning"*, Confucius reveals the process, step by step, by which self-development is attained and by which it flows over into the common life to serve the State and bless mankind. The order of development that Confucius has set forth is as follows:—

Investigation of pehnomena
Learning
Sincerity
Rectitude of purpose
Self-development
Family discipline
Local self-government
Universal self-government

"The ancients," said Confucius, "when they wished to exemplify illustrious virtue throughout the empire, first ordered well their States. Desiring to maintain well their States, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated themselves. Wishing to cultivate themselves, they first rectified their purpose. Wishing to rectify their purpose, they first sought to think sincerely. Wishing to think sincerely, they first extended their knowledge as widely as possible. This they did by investigation of things.

"By investigation of things, their knowledge became extensive. Their knowledge being extensive, their thoughts became sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their purposes were rectified. Their purposes being rectified, they cultivated themselves. They being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their States were rightly governed. Their States being rightly governed, the empire was thereby tranquil and prosperous.

"For the completion of life's work, it requires the whole of life, every deflection from virtue marring by so much the perfection of the whole. Saintliness lies not in purity alone, but in the rounded fullness of the well-planned and well-spent life; and life becomes more a thing of beauty if extended to old age".

Conclusion

Confucius had rendered immortal the sixth century B.C. He was a born ruler of men. He would have shone as one of the world's greatest monarchs if circumstances had been favourable. He had a highly developed moral sense and a profound realisation of the supreme importance of morals in human life. His greatness was universally recognized for many centuries. Confucius is held in the highest reverence even now by hundreds of millions of the world's inhabitants.

Confucius was a great Chinese teacher and social reformer. He lived in an age of disorder, disquiet, disharmony, dissensions and feudal wars. He is regarded as the Father of Chinese culture. He has had a great part in moulding the history of China and his influence is to this day a dominant factor in the public and the private life of that country.

Confucius excelled as a diligent student of antiquity. He described himself as born without knowledge, which he had to acquire through earnest communion with the past.

Confucius possessed a commanding and lovable personality. He has been a model and an inspiration to the scholars and thinkers of his nation for 2400 years. He nobly deserves the words which often appear above his altar: "The teacher of ten thousand generations".

At the end of a popular history of Confucius, there occur these lines:

Confucius! Confucius! How great was Confucius!
Before him there was no Confucius,
Since him there has been no other.
Confucius! Confucius! How great was Confucius!

Confucius is still revered by millions of people. The majority of China's four hundred millions are still Confucianist at heart.

Glory to Confucius, the great moralist, statesman and social reformer of China!

JESUS

Jesus was a Palestine Jew. He was born of Mary and Joseph at Bethlehem without impregnation and out of immaculate conception. He was meek and humble. He remained as innocent as a child throughout his life. He was tolerant, kind and merciful. He was a Yogi of the East though he preached in Palestine.

Jesus welcomed and embraced the sinners, the despised and the harlots and purified them. He comforted them and gave them solace and peace. He raised the fallen. He brought relief and rest to the broken-hearted.

Jesus said: "Unless you become as little children, you shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of God". To Jesus, God was a loving Father. Jesus' watchword was love for God and fellowmen.

"Have faith in God. The Lord is our God. Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart and all thy soul, and all thy mind, and all thy strength. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The love of God manifests in the love of man." This is the central teaching of Jesus.

Jesus was a world teacher, a prophet and Messiah. His *Sermon on the Mount* is nothing but the practice of Sadachara or right conduct. It corresponds to the practice of the Yama-Niyama of Raja Yoga, the Eightfold Path of the Lord Buddha. It is marvellous, inspiring and soul-stirring.

Jesus washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper. How humble he was! He said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shalt inherit the earth".

Lord Krishna washed the feet of the guests in the Rajasuya Yajna performed by King Yudhishthira. Avataras or mighty souls perform such actions. Should you not learn lessons from those great persons? Lord Krishna, the mighty Lord of the three worlds, took delight in washing the feet of the guests. Should you not learn to be humble? How haughty and proud you have become! You are puffed up with vanity and intoxicated with pride when you possess a little money, a small car and a small estate. You think you are a mighty emperor and walk with arrogant steps and treat others with contempt. You think too much of yourself and your position in life. In reality, your officership has created in you a slave mentality and a fear of losing your position!

Christ's message has always been: "Love thy neighbour as thyself". He said: "The Kingdom of Heaven is within thee. His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Be not anxious. Seek ye first His Kingdom. Everything will be added unto thee". He was the way, the truth and the light, for all men to follow.

Jesus Christ laid stress on love of God and love of fellowmen, and the need for repentance or a change of heart, for entry into the Kingdom of God. He instructed people to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. He said that a contrite heart was necessary in order to receive God's forgiveness.

"The Kingdom of God is within thee. Seek and ye shall find. Knock and the door shall be opened unto thee." This is the foundation upon which the ethics of Jesus has been built.

Jesus recommended prayer as a means to seek the Kingdom. He said, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more good things shall your Father who is in heaven give to them who ask Him?".

Jesus said: "You have heard that it was said by them of old time, 'Thou shalt not kill and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment'. But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment". In the *Sermon on the Mount*, he said, "Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled up. Those who seek the Kingdom of God within themselves will find Him, and therefore, 'All things would be added' ".

"Overcome evil by good." Jesus prescribed this great rule for his followers and the world at large. This is only the practice of Ahimsa or non-violence which purifies and softens the heart. Ahimsa is a form of truth only.

Lord Jesus retired after baptism into the wilderness beyond the Dead Sea. He disappeared at the age of thirteen and reappeared in his thirty-first year. During this period, from his thirteenth to his thirty-first year, he came to India and practised Yoga. Thereafter he preached for about two or three years and passed into the Great Beyond.

Jesus left Jerusalem and reached the land of Indus in the company of merchants. He visited Varanasi, Rajgriha and other places in India. He spent several years in Hindustan. Jesus lived like a Hindu or a Buddhist monk, a life of burning renunciation and dispassion. He assimilated the ideals, precepts and principles of Hinduism. Christianity is modified Hinduism only, which was suitable for those people who lived in the period of Christ. Really speaking, Jesus was a child of the soil of India only. That is the reason why there is so much of similarity between his teachings and the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism.

Jesus preached on earth the divine and perfect love. He spoke very highly of gifts and charity. He said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive. Give thy heart's best treasures. From fair nature learn. Give thy love and ask not. Await not a return. And the more thou spendeth from thy little store, the more will God give thee. He will give thee a double quantity".

Jesus said: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto the treasure hid in a field which a man hath found. He selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field".

Jesus Christ was crucified and yet he is living now. He has immortalized his name. None can silence his voice. His voice has been speaking through centuries. Jesus said: "Come into the Kingdom by selling all ye have and distributing it to the poor". Men have not adhered to his message, but his voice has not been silenced.

Jesus was a perfect Yogi. He did many miracles. He stopped the waves of the ocean. He gave sight to blind people. He cured lepers by mere touch. He fed a large multitude with a small loaf of bread.

Lord Christ was crucified. He accepted death with great joy in order that others might live. What a magnanimous soul! He had learnt to die cheerfully for His children. His last words are an example to the world. He said: "O Lord! Forgive those people who are torturing me and putting me to death, for they know not what they do". How noble! His hands were tied to the cross and nails were hammered into them. In this state he prayed for the people who were tormenting him. What a large and forgiving heart he had! Jesus was an embodiment of forgiveness or Kshama. That is the reason why he still lives in our hearts and why millions of people now worship him.

Jesus set an example to man to overcome evil by good. The cross of Jesus will remain for all time as the supreme example of this doctrine: "Return good for evil". Jesus surrendered himself completely to God. He knew that God changed the heart of the unjust through the sufferings of the just.

After Jesus was crucified, he was restored to life. The resurrection or the rising again from the dead was, according to Jesus, and ineffable condition in which all bodily limitation was transcended. It was a condition of being perpetually in the presence of God. Jesus was a fully developed Yogi and sage. He had no identification with the physical body. He identified himself with the Supreme Soul. He said: "I and my Father are one".

The true significance of Christmas

Christmas is named after Christ. This is the birthday of Lord Jesus, the Saviour Christ, the Yogi of the East. He was born in a stable at Bethlehem, of Mary and Joseph, the obscure village carpenter. Mary and Joseph made the stable a home for Christ, the King, the Prince of Peace. The birth of Jesus is celebrated all over the world as the sacred Christmas.

Lord Jesus was an embodiment of mercy, love and humility. He was an apostle of non-violence and peace. His body was crucified, but his voice has been speaking through the centuries.

The message of Christmas is the message of universal love. It is the message of ineffable divine glory and splendour. The message of Christmas is the message of peace and goodwill among all nations.

Christmas is more than a day of rejoicing and festivity. It is a day for realising the Christ-consciousness or cosmic consciousness. It is a day for remembering the noble deeds of Lord Jesus and his sacred life of pristine purity. Christmas comes and Christmas goes, but let the spirit of Christmas be ever with you all.

Merry-making is not Christmas at all. Christmas does not consist in ringing bells and singing songs, exchanging mutual gifts and sending Christmas cards, and in enjoying rich repasts and heavy dinners and eating cakes.

Christmas is a state of spiritual awakening. To realise the Kingdom of Heaven within yourself, to hold communion with the Lord in the chambers of your heart, to regain your lost divinity, to attain Christ-consciousness or cosmic consciousness, to love all, to include all in the warm embrace of your love is real Christmas.

Realise the spirit of Christ. Walk in the footprints of Christ. Dive deep into the heart of Jesus. Ever seek to express, in your daily life, love, joy and peace. Imbibe Christ's message of love and sacrifice. Manifest the latent Christ within you. Follow the *Sermon on the Mount.* Attain God-consciousness. Live in the spirit of Christ's teachings. Annihilate this little self-arrogating personality and melt yourself in Christ or the Universal Soul. This is real Christmas.

All wish to enter the Kingdom of God. But how many of you possess the real spirit of Christ? How many of you are real Christians? How many of you follow the teachings, precepts and doctrines of Christ? How many of you love your neighbours as your own self? Those who are endowed with purity of heart, humility, universal love, generosity and nobility—they only can attain the Kingdom of God or supreme peace and immortality.

The spirit or heart of Christ is seriously lacking in the vast majority of persons. The love of Christ is badly wanted. What is Christmas without love, mercy and purity? Everybody wants to exploit his neighbour. One nation wants to destroy another nation. Is this Christmas? Is this the teaching of Christ?

Real Christmas never comes and goes. It is eternal. Feel the spirit of Christmas not only on one day, but throughout the year. Every day is a Christmas day for a real follower of Christ, for a thirsting aspirant.

GURU NANAK

Birth

Whenever there is a big catastrophe in the land, whenever there is decline of righteousness, whenever there are oppression and chaos in the land, whenever the faith of the people in God wanes, great men or saints appear, from time to time, to enrich sacred literature, to protect Dharma, to destroy unrighteousness and reawaken the love of God in the minds of the people. India was in a bad plight. Babar invaded India. His armies assaulted and sacked several cities. The ascetic captives were forced to do rigorous work. There was wholesale massacre everywhere. The kings were bloodthirsty, cruel and tyrannical. There was no real religion. There was religious persecution. The real spirit of religion was crushed by ritualism. The hearts of the people were filled with falsehood, cunningness, selfishness and greed. At such a time Guru Nanak came to the world with a message of peace, unity, love and devotion to God. He came at a time when there was fight between the Hindus and the Mohammedans—when real religion was replaced by mere rituals and forms. He came to preach the gospel of peace, brotherhood or the unity of humanity, love and sacrifice.

Nanak, the Khatri mystic and poet and founder of the Sikh religion, was born in 1469 A.D. in the village of Talwandi on the Ravi, in the Lahore district of Punjab. On one side of the house in which Guru Nanak was born, there stands now the famous shrine called 'Nankana Sahib'. Nanak has been called the 'Prophet of the Punjab and Sind'. Nanak's father was Mehta Kalu Chand, known popularly as Kalu. He was the accountant of the village. He was an agriculturist also. Nanak's mother was Tripta. Even in his childhood, Nanak had a mystic disposition and he used to talk about God with Sadhus. He had a contemplative mind and a pious nature. He began to spend his time in meditation and spiritual practices. He was, by habit, reserved in nature. He would eat but little.

Nanak's education

When Nanak was a boy of seven, he was sent to Gopal Pandha to learn Hindi. The teacher told Nanak to read a book. Nanak replied, "What will it avail to know all and not have a knowledge of God?". Then the teacher wrote the Hindi alphabets for him on a wooden slate. Nanak said to the teacher, "Please tell me, sir, what books have you studied? What is the extent of your knowledge?". Gopal Pandha replied, "I know mathematics and the accounts necessary for shopkeeping". Nanak replied, "This knowledge will not in any way help you in obtaining freedom". The teacher was very much astonished at the words of the boy. He told him, "Nanak, tell me something which could help me in the attainment of salvation". Nanak said, "O teacher! Burn worldly love, make its ashes into ink and make the intellect into a fine paper. Now make the love of God your pen, and your heart the writer, and under the instructions of your Guru, write and meditate. Write the Name of the Lord and His praises and write, 'He has no limit this side or the other'. O teacher! Learn to write this account". The teacher was struck with wonder.

Then Kalu sent his son to Pundit Brij Nath to learn Sanskrit. The Pundit wrote for him 'Om'. Nanak asked the teacher the meaning of 'Om'. The teacher replied, "You have no business to know the meaning of 'Om' now. I cannot explain to you the meaning". Nanak said, "O teacher! What is the use of reading without knowing the meaning? I shall explain to you the meaning of 'Om'". Then Nanak gave an elaborate explanation of the significance of 'Om'. The Sanskrit Pundit was struck with amazement.

Nanak's occupation

Then Kalu tried his level best to turn Nanak's mind towards worldly matters. He put Nanak in the work of looking after the cultivation of the land. Nanak did not pay any attention to his work. He meditated even in the fields. He went out to tend the cattle, but centred his mind on the worship of God. The cattle trespassed into a neighbour's field. Kalu rebuked

Nanak for his idleness. Nanak replied, "I am not idle, but am busy in guarding my own fields". Kalu asked him, "Where are your fields?". Nanak replied, "My body is a field. The mind is the ploughman. Righteousness is the cultivation. Modesty is water for irrigation. I have sown the field with the seed of the sacred Name of the Lord. Contentment is my field's harrow. Humility is its hedge. The seeds will germinate into a good crop with love and devotion. Fortunate is the house in which such a crop is brought! O sir, mammon will not accompany us to the next world. It has infatuated the whole world, but there are few who understand its delusive nature".

Then Kalu put him in charge of a small shop. Nanak distributed the things to Sadhus and poor people. He would give away in charity whatever he could lay hands on in his father's house and in the shop. Nanak said, "My shop is made of time and space. Its store consists of the commodities of truth and self-control. I am always dealing with my customers, the Sadhus and Mahatmas, contact with whom is very profitable indeed".

When Nanak was fifteen years of age, his father gave him twenty rupees and said, "Nanak, go to the market and purchase some profitable commodity". Kalu sent his servant Bala also to accompany Nanak. Nanak and Bala reached Chuhar Kana, a village about twenty miles from Talwandi. Nanak met a party of Fakirs. He thought within himself: "Let me feed these Fakirs now. This is the most profitable bargain I can make". He purchased provisions immediately and fed them sumptuously. Then he came back to his house. The servant informed his master of his son's bargain. Kalu was very much annoyed. He gave a slap on Nanak's face.

The father thought that Nanak did not like sedentary work. Therefore he said to Nanak, "O dear son! Ride on a horse and do travelling business. This will suit you nicely". Nanak replied, "Revered father! My trade is divine knowledge. The profits are the purseful of good deeds with which I can certainly reach the domain of the Lord".

Then Kalu Chand told Nanak: "If you do not like trade or business, you may serve in some office". Nanak replied, "I am already a servant of God. I am endeavouring to do my duty honestly and whole-heartedly in the service of my Lord. I carry out His behests implicitly. I desire fervently to get the reward of divine grace from the Lord by serving Him untiringly and incessantly". On hearing this, the father became silent and retired from there.

Nanak's marriage

Guru Nanak had only one sister named Nanaki. She was married to Jai Ram, a Dewan in the service of Nawab Daulat Khan Lodi, who was a relative of Sultan Bahlol, the then Emperor of Delhi. The Nawab had an extensive Jagir in Sultanpur near Kapurthala. Nanak also married soon after his sister's marriage. His wife was Sulakhani, daughter of Mula, a resident of Batala, in the district of Gurdaspur. Marriage and the birth of two children did not, in any way, stop Nanak's spiritual pursuits. He went even then to forests and lonely places for meditation.

Nanaki and Jai Ram loved and respected Nanak much. Rai Bular, the Zamindar of Talwandi, also had great regard for Nanak. Rai Bular and Jai Ram thought that Nanak should be fixed in some job at Sultanpur. Jai Ram took Nanak to the Nawab, who put Nanak in charge of his storehouse. Nanak discharged his duties very satisfactorily. Everybody was very much pleased with his work. In those days the salary was given in kind and so Nanak received provisions. He spent a small portion for his own maintenance and distributed the rest to the poor.

Nanak had two sons named Srichand (born in 1494 A.D.) and Lakshmichand (born in 1497 A.D). Srichand renounced the world and founded a sect of ascetics called Udasis. The Udasis grew long beards and long hair. The application of razor to any part of the body was strictly prohibited. Lakshmichand became a man of the world. He married and had two sons.

Nanak gave up his service and distributed his goods amongst the poor. He lived in the jungles and put on the garb of a Fakir. He practised severe austerities and intense meditation. He sang inspired songs. These are all collected and preserved in the *Adi Granth*—the sacred book of the Sikhs.

The minstrel Mardana came from Talwandi and became Nanak's servant and faithful devotee. When Nanak sang songs, Mardana used to accompany Nanak on the rebeck. Mardana was an expert musician. He sang Nanak's songs always to the accompaniment of the rebeck. Nanak became a public preacher at the age of thirty-four. He began to preach his mission. His preaching produced a deep impression on the minds of the public. He left Sultanpur and toured about in Northern India.

Rai Bular, the Zamindar of Talwandi, became very old. He wanted to see Nanak and so he sent a messenger to Nanak. Nanak at once proceeded to Talwandi and saw Rai Bular and his own parents and relatives. All his relatives began to explain to Nanak how they stood towards him in relationship and persuaded him to give up his mission and stay at home comfortably. Nanak replied: "'Forgiveness' is my mother and 'contentment' my father. 'Truth' is my uncle and 'love' my brother. 'Affection' is my cousin and 'patience' my daughter. 'Peace' is my constant female companion and 'intelligence' my handmaid. Thus is composed my whole family whose members are my constant associates. The only one God—the Creator of the whole universe—is my husband. He who forsakes Him will be caught up in the round of births and deaths and will suffer in various ways".

Guru Nanak had great influence over Babar, who had very great regard for Nanak. Babar offered valuable presents to Nanak. Nanak, having declined them, asked Babar to release the captives of Eminabad and restore their properties. Babar at once carried out the wishes of Guru Nanak and implored Guru Nanak to give him some religious instructions. Guru Nanak said, "Worship God. Repeat His Name. Give up wine and gambling. Be just. Revere saints and pious men. Be kind to all. Be merciful towards the vanquished".

Guru Nanak's Tapas and meditation

Nanak practised rigorous meditation in order to realise God quickly. He was always in a deep meditative mood. He did not care for his body. The parents thought that Nanak was ailing seriously and so they sent for a physician. Nanak said to the doctor: "You have come to diagnose my ailment and prescribe medicine. You take my hand and feel the pulse. Poor ignorant doctor, you do not know that the pain is in my mind. O doctor! Go back to your house. I am under God-intoxication. Your medicine is of no use to me. Few know my disease. The Lord, who gave me this pain, will remove it. I feel the pain of separation from God. I feel the pain which death may inflict. O ignorant doctor! Do not give me any medicine. I feel the pain that my body will perish by disease. I forgot God and indulged in sensual pleasures. Then I had this pain. The wicked heart is punished. If a man repeats even a portion of the Name of the Lord, his body will become like gold and his soul will be rendered pure. All his pain and disease will be annihilated. Nanak will be saved by the true Name of the Lord. O physician! Go back to your house. Do not take my curse with you. Leave me alone now".

Nanak gave up food and drink for some days. He became wholly absorbed in divine contemplation. He observed perfect silence. He concealed himself in the forests for days together.

Guru Nanak's wanderings

Nanak lived in this world for a period of seventy years. He wandered from place to place. He went to Sayyidpur in the district of Gujranwala. He then proceeded to Kurukshetra, Hardwar, Brindavan, Varanasi, Agra, Kanpur, Ayodhya, Prayag, Patna, Rajgir, Gaya and Puri. He travelled throughout India. He made four extensive tours. He went to Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Mecca and Medina also. He travelled to Bengal, the Deccan, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Arabia, Baghdad, Kabul, Kandahar and Siam. He held controversies with Pundits and Mohammedan priests. He debated with the Pandas of Gaya, Hardwar and other places of pilgrimage. He dispelled the clouds of ignorance and doubts of many people. He enjoined on all people to live righteously and with brotherly love and hospitality. He preached and taught: "Do Nama Smarana. Love God. Be devoted to one God. Serve your fellow beings. God is all-in-all. Pray. Praise Him always. Attain the bliss of union with Him". Nanak succeeded remarkably in changing the minds of men and winning their love and confidence and in directing them along the path of righteousness and devotion. He tried his best to unite the Hindus and the Muslims.

Guru Nanak proceeded to Multan. He halted by the side of a river. Multan was a place filled with Fakirs always. Prahlad was born at Multan. Shams Tabriez and Mansoor also lived there. The Pirs came to know that Guru Nanak had come to Multan. They sent him milk in a cup, filled to the very brim. Nanak put inside the cup some *Batashas*—small hollow lumps of sugar—and a flower above them and returned the milk. Mardana told his master that a thing like milk should not be returned and should be drunk by him. Guru Nanak replied, "Look here, Mardana. You are a simpleton. The Pirs have played a small trick. They have not sent this milk for my use. There is deep philosophy at the back of it. There is profound significance. The meaning is that Multan is already full of Pirs and Fakirs, just like the cup that is filled with milk to the very brim, and that there is no room for another religious teacher. I have also paid them in the same coin. My answer is that I will mix with them like the *Batashah* and would predominate over them like the flower placed in the cup of milk". The Pirs and the Fakirs then came to see Guru Nanak. Nanak sang a song. The proud and arrogant Pirs came to their senses now. They became very humble. They said to Guru Nanak: "Pardon us, O revered Guru! We were surely self-conceited. Kindly give us spiritual instructions and bless us". Guru Nanak blessed them and gave them instructions.

Two miracles

There is a remarkable incident in connection with Nanak's visit to Mecca. At Mecca, Nanak was found sleeping with his feet towards the Kaaba, before which the Mohammedans prostrated themselves when performing their prayer. Kazi Rukan-ud-din, who observed this, angrily remarked: "Infidel! How dare you dishonour God's place by turning your feet towards Him?". He also kicked Nanak. Nanak silently replied, "I am tired. Turn my feet in any direction where the place of God is not". Kazi Rukan-ud-din took hold of Nanak's feet angrily and moved them towards the opposite direction. The mosque also began to move. The Kazi was struck with wonder. He then recognised the glory of Guru Nanak.

Guru Nanak visited Hassan Abdal in the Attock district in the North Western Frontier in 1520 A.D. He sat under a Peepul tree at the foot of a hillock. On top of the hill, there lived a Mohammedan saint named Vali Quandhari. There was then a spring of water on top of the hill. Mardana used to get water from the spring. Guru Nanak became very popular in a short time. The Mohammedan saint became jealous. He forbade Mardana from taking water out of the spring. Mardana informed Guru Nanak of the conduct of the Mohammedan saint. Guru Nanak said to Mardana, "O Mardana! Do not be afraid. God will send water down to us soon". The spring that was on the top of the hill dried up immediately. There arose a spring at the foot of the hill where Guru Nanak halted. The saint was very much enraged. He hurled a big rock from the top of the hill down to the spot where Nanak was sitting. Guru Nanak stopped the rock by his open hand. The impression of his hand on the rock exists even now. Then the saint came to the Guru, prostrated at his feet and asked for pardon. Guru Nanak smiled and pardoned the arrogant saint. There now stands a beautiful shrine by the side of the spring which is called: "*Punja Sahib*".

Teachings of Guru Nanak

Guru Nanak felt that it would be improper to postpone Nama Smarana or remembering the Name of the Lord, even by a single breath, because no one could tell whether the breath that had gone in would come out or not. Nanak says, "We are men of one breath. I know not a longer time-limit". Guru Nanak calls him alone a true saint who remembers the Name of the Lord with every incoming and outgoing breath. The ideal is practical and within the reach of every man. He tells the people not to lose any time but to begin at once. He also says that there are no barriers of race, class, caste, creed or colour which check the progress of any in reaching the goal. He realised the great truth of the brotherhood of religions. He preached the universal brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God to all people.

Guru Nanak was a reformer. He attacked the corruptions in society. He strongly protested against formalism and ritualism. He carried the message of peace and of love for everybody. He was very liberal in his views. He did not observe the rules of caste. He tried his level best to remove the superstitions of the people. He preached purity, justice, goodness and the love of God. He endeavoured to remove the moral putrefaction that was prevalent amongst the people and to infuse real spirit in the worship of God and true faith in religion and God. He introduced the singing of God's praise, along with music, as a means of linking the soul of man with God. Wherever he moved, he took Mardana with him to play on the rebeck while he sang. He said, "Serve God. Serve humanity. Only service to humanity shall secure for us a place in heaven". Guru Nanak had great reverence for women. He allowed them to join all religious gatherings and conferences and to sing the praises of God. He gave them their full share in religious functions.

Guru Nanak clearly says: "The road to the abode of God is long and arduous. There are no short cuts for rich people. Everyone must undergo the same discipline. Everyone must purify his mind through service of humanity and Nama Smarana. Everyone must live according to the will of the Lord without grumbling or murmuring. How to find Him? There is one way. Make His will your own. Be in tune with the Infinite. There is no other way". The first stage in making the divine will one's own is attained through prayer for divine grace or favour—*Ardas* for *Guru Prasad*. Guru Nanak attaches very great importance to prayer. He says that nothing can be achieved by man without divine favour. He says: "Approach God with perfect humility. Throw yourself on His mercy. Give up pride, show and egoism. Beg for His kindness and favour. Do not think of your own merits, abilities, faculties and capacities. Be prepared to die in the pursuit of His love and union with Him. Love God as a woman loves her husband. Make absolute unreserved self-surrender. You can get divine favour and love".

The beautiful composition of mystic poems uttered by Nanak is contained in '*Japji*'. It is sung by every Sikh at daybreak. The '*Sohila*' contains the evening prayers. In '*Japji*', Guru Nanak has given a vivid and concise description of the stages through which man must pass in order to reach the final resting place or abode of eternal bliss. There are five stages or *Khandas.* The first is called *Dharm Khand* or "The Realm of Duty". Everyone must do this duty properly. Everyone must tread the path of righteousness. Everyone will be judged according to his actions.

The next stage is *Gyan Khand* or "The Realm of Knowledge" where the spirit of divine knowledge reigns. The aspirant does his duty with intense faith and sincerity. He has the knowledge now, that only by doing his duty in a perfect manner, he can reach the abode of bliss or the goal of life.

The third stage is *Sharam Khand.* This is "The Realm of Ecstasy". There is the spiritual rapture here. There is beauty. The Dharma has become a part of one's own nature. It has become an ingrained habit. It is no more a mere matter of duty or knowledge.

The fourth stage is *Karam Khand* or "The Realm of Power". The God of power rules over this realm. The aspirant acquires power. He becomes a mighty hero. He becomes invincible. The fear of death vanishes.

The fifth or the final stage is *Sach Khand* or "The Realm of Truth". The formless One reigns here. Here the aspirant becomes one with God. He has attained Godhead. He has transmuted himself into Divinity. He has attained the goal of his life. He has found out his permanent resting place. Now ends the arduous journey of the soul.

Guru Nanak again and again insists thus: "Realise your unity with all. Love God. Love God in man. Sing the love of God. Repeat God's Name. Sing His glory. Love God as the lotus loves water, as the bird Chatak loves rain, as the wife loves her husband. Make divine love thy pen and thy heart the writer. If you repeat the Name, you live; if you forget it, you die. Open your heart to Him. Enter into communion with Him. Sink into His arms and feel the divine embrace".

Nanak has given a beautiful summary of his teachings in one of his hymns as follows:—

> *Love the saints of every faith:*
> *Put away thy pride.*
> *Remember the essence of religion*
> *Is meekness and sympathy,*
> *Not fine clothes,*
> *Not the Yogi's garb and ashes,*
> *Not the blowing of the horns,*
> *Not the shaven head,*
> *Not long prayers,*
> *Not recitations and torturings,*
> *Not the ascetic way,*
> *But a life of goodness and purity,*
> *Amid the world's temptations.*

"*Vahe Guru*" is the Guru Mantra for the followers of Guru Nanak. The other important Mantra for repetition is: "*Ek Omkar Satnam Karta Purkh Nirbhav Nirvair, Akalmurat Ajuni Savai Bhang Gur Parsad*—God is but one, His Name is true, He is the Creator, He pervades the whole universe, He is without fear, He is without enmity, He is immortal, He is birthless, He is self-born and self-existent, He is the remover of the darkness (of ignorance) and He is merciful". The Lord is eternal. He has no beginning and no end.

The Granth Sahib

Guru Nanak invented the *Gurumukhi* characters by simplifying the Sanskrit characters. The holy *Granth* of the Sikhs is in *Gurumukhi*. It is worshipped by the Sikhs and the Sindhis. Every Gurudwara has a *Granth Sahib*. The holy *Granth*, popularly known as *Adi Granth*, contains the hymns of the first five Gurus. They were all collected, arranged and formed into one volume called *Guru Granth Sahib* by the fifth Guru. It contains a few selections from the hymns of Kabir and other contemporary Vaishnavite saints. Later on, the hymns of the ninth Guru were incorporated in the holy *Granth* by the tenth Guru. The compositions of Guru Nanak are very extensive.

The *Granth Sahib* begins with the following: "There is but one God whose name is true—the Creator". It contains a code of high morals. Purity of life, obedience to Guru, mercy, charity, temperance, justice, straightforwardness, truthfulness, sacrifice, service, love and abstinence from animal food are among the virtues on which great emphasis is laid; while lust, anger, pride, hatred, egoism, greed, selfishness, cruelty, back-biting and falsehood are vehemently condemned.

Guru Nanak's last days

Nanak settled down at Khartarpur towards the close of his life. His whole family lived there together for the first time. Houses for the dwelling of Nanak's family and a Dharmashala were also built. Mardana also lived with the Guru. Every day the '*Japji*' and '*Sohila*'—the morning and the evening prayers composed by Guru Nanak—were recited in his presence. Guru Nanak died in the year 1538 A.D. at the age of sixty-nine. Guru Angad succeeded Guru Nanak. The other Gurus are: Guru Amardas, Guru Ramdas, Guru Arjun Dev, Guru Hargovind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Har Krishan, Guru Tej Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh.

May the blessings of Guru Nanak be upon you all!

The Acharyas

The Acharyas

SANKARA

Chaos pervaded all through India in the matter of religion and philosophy. Sect after sect, such as Charvakas, Lokayathikas, Kapalikas, Shaktas, Sankhyas, Buddhas and Madhyamikas sprang up. The number of religions rose as high as seventy-two. There was fight amongst sects. There was no peace anywhere. Chaos and confusion reigned supreme. There was superstition and bigotry. Darkness prevailed over the once happy land of Rishis, sages and Yogins. The once glorious land of the Aryans was in a miserable state. Such was the state of the country at the time which just preceded the Avatara of Sankaracharya.

The existence of Vedic Dharma in India today is due to Sankara. The forces opposed to Vedic religion were more numerous and powerful at the time of Sankara than they are today. Still, single-handed, within a very short time, Sankara overpowered them all and restored the Vedic Dharma and Advaita Vedanta to its pristine purity in the land. The weapon he used was pure knowledge and spirituality. The previous Avataras, like Rama and Krishna, used physical forces because the obstacles to Dharma in those days arose from the physical obstructions and molestations of the Asuras. The menace to Dharma in the Kali age arose from obstacles that were more internal than external, more mental than physical. The seeds of Adharma were then working in the minds of almost everyone. Hence the evil had to be combated purely by the weapon of knowledge and self-purification. It was in order to forge this weapon and wield it with efficacy that Sankara took birth in the Brahmin Varna and entered the Sannyasa order early in life. The previous Avataras like Rama and Krishna took birth in the Kshatriya Varna, because in their days they had to wield military weapons in the restoration of Dharma.

All are no doubt aware of the very important position assigned to Sankaracharya in the history of Indian philosophy. It can be affirmed, without any fear of contradiction, that

Bharata Varsha would have ceased to be Bharata Varsha several centuries ago and would never have survived the murderous sword, the devastating fire and the religious intolerance of the successive invaders, if Sankara had not lived the life he lived and taught the lessons he taught. And those lessons are still pulsating in every cell and in every protoplasm of the true aspirant and the true Hindu.

Birth

Sankara was born in a very poor family in the year 788 A.D. in a village named Kaladi, six miles to the east of Alwaye. Kaladi is a railway station on the Kochi-Shoranur rail link. Sankara was a Nambudiri Brahmin. Rajasekhara, a Zamindar, built a Siva temple in Kaladi and formed an Agrahara for Brahmins who were in the service of the temple. Vidyadhiraja was doing Puja in the temple. He had only a son named Sivaguru. Sivaguru studied the Shastras and married at the proper age. He had no child. He and his wife Aryamba prayed to Lord Siva to bless them with a son. A son was born to them in the Vasanta Ritu or the spring season at noon, in the auspicious Abhijit Muhurta and under the constellation Ardhra. This son was Sankara.

Sivaguru died when Sankara was seven years old. Sankara had none to look after his education. His mother was an extraordinary woman. She took special care to educate her son in all the Shastras. Sankara's Upanayana or thread ceremony was performed in his seventh year, after the death of his father. Sankara exhibited extraordinary intelligence in his boyhood. When he was only sixteen, he became a master of all the philosophies and theologies. He began to write commentaries on the Gita, the Upanishads and the Brahma Sutras when he was only sixteen years old. What a great marvel!

Sankara's mother was consulting astrologers about horoscopes of suitable girls for her son's marriage. But Sankara had a firm resolve to renounce the world and become a Sannyasin. Sankara's mother was very much grieved that there would be no one to perform her funeral rites after her death. Sankara gave full assurance to his mother that he would always be ready to serve her at the death-bed and perform the usual funeral rites. Even then his mother was not satisfied.

One day, Sankara and his mother went to take bath in the river. Sankara plunged into the water and felt that a crocodile was dragging him by the foot. He shouted out to his mother at the top of his voice: "O dear mother! A crocodile is dragging me down. I am lost. Let me die peacefully as a Sannyasin. Let me have the satisfaction of dying as a Sannyasin. Give me your permission now. Let me take Apath-sannyasa".

The mother immediately allowed him to take Sannyasa. Sankara took Apath-sannyasa (the adoption of Sannyasa when death is near) at once. The crocodile let him go unharmed. Sankara came out of the water as a nominal Sannyasin. He again repeated his promise to his mother. He left her under the care of his relatives and gave away his little property to them. He then proceeded to find out a Guru with a view to get himself formally initiated into the sacred order of Sannyasa.

In search of a Guru

Sankara met Swami Govindapada Acharya in a hermitage in Badrikashram (Badrinath) in the Himalayas and he prostrated at the teacher's feet. Govinda asked Sankara who he was. Sankara replied: "O revered Guru! I am neither fire nor air nor earth nor water—none of these, but the Immortal Atma that is hidden in all names and forms". He also said in the end: "I am the son of Sivaguru, a Brahmin of Kerala. My father died in my childhood. I was brought up by my mother. I have studied the Vedas and the Shastras under a teacher. I took Apath-sannyasa when a crocodile caught my foot while I was taking bath in the river. Kindly initiate me formally into the holy order of Sannyasa".

Swami Govinda was very much pleased with the truthful narration given by Sankara. Having initiated him and invested him with the robe of a Sannyasin, Swami Govinda taught him the philosophy of Advaita which he himself had learnt from his Guru—Gaudapada Acharya. Sankara learnt all the philosophical tenets from his Guru Govindapada. Govinda asked Sankara to go to Kashi. Sankara proceeded to Kashi where he wrote all his famous commentaries on the Brahma Sutras, the Upanishads and the Gita and successfully met all the criticisms levelled against them. He then began to propagate his philosophy. Sankara had the greatest esteem for his Guru Govindapada and his Parama Guru or the teacher's teacher, Gaudapada.

Sankara's Digvijaya

Sankara's philosophical conquests are unique in the world. He had his triumphant tour all over India. He met the leaders of different schools of thought. He convinced them by arguments and established the supremacy and truth of the religion that he expounded in his commentaries. He went to all the celebrated seats of learning. He challenged the learned men to discussion, argued with them and converted them to his opinions and views. He defeated Bhatta Bhaskara and condemned his Bhashya on the Vedanta Sutras. He then met Dandi and Mayura and taught them his philosophy. He then defeated in argument Harsha, author of *Khandana Khanda Kadya*, Abhinavagupta, Murari Misra, Udayanacharya, Dharmagupta, Kumarila and Prabhakara.

Sankara then proceeded to Mahishmati. Mandana Misra was the chief Pundit of the court of Mahishmati. Mandana was brought up in the Karma Mimamsa faith and so he had intense hatred for the Sannyasins. He was performing a Sraaddha ceremony when Sankara somehow dropped down there. Immediately Mandana Misra became very furious. An ugly conversation was started when the Brahmins, who were present there for dinner, interposed and pacified Mandana Misra. Then Sankara challenged Mandana to a religious controversy. Mandana agreed. Bharati who was the wife of Mandana Misra and who possessed scholarly erudition was appointed as the umpire. It was agreed beforehand that Sankara, if defeated, would become a householder and marry; and that Mandana, if defeated, would become a Sannyasin and receive the robe of a Sannyasin from the hands of his own wife. The controversy began in right earnest and continued for days without any interruption. Bharati did not sit and listen to their controversy. She threw two garlands, one each over the shoulders of each of the disputants, and said: "He whose garland begins to fade first should consider himself defeated". She left the place and began attending to her household duties. The controversy went on for seventeen days. The garland of Mandana Misra began to fade first. Mandana Misra accepted his defeat and offered to become a Sannyasin and follow Sankara.

Bharati was an Avatara of Sarasvati, the Goddess of Learning. Once the sage Durvasa chanted the Vedas before Brahma and his wife in a big assembly. Durvasa committed a small mistake. Sarasvati laughed at it. Durvasa became enraged and gave a curse that she would take birth in the world. Hence Sarasvati had to take birth as Bharati.

Bharati now interposed and said to Sankara: "I am the other half of Mandana. You have defeated only one half of Mandana. Let us have a controversy". Sankara objected to have controversy with a woman. Bharati quoted instances wherein there had been controversies with women. Sankara then agreed and this controversy also went on uninterruptedly for seventeen days. Bharati passed from one Shastra to another. At last she found out that she could not defeat Sankara. She decided to defeat him by means of the science of Kama Shastra.

Sankara asked Bharati to give him an interval of one month for his preparation to hold controversy with her in the science of Kama Shastra. She agreed. Sankara went to Kashi. He separated his astral body from his physical body by means of his Yogic powers and left his physical body in the hole of a big tree and asked his disciples to take care of that physical body. He then entered into the dead body of Raja Amaruka which was about to be cremated. The Raja rose up and all the people rejoiced at the astounding incident.

The ministers and queens soon found out that the revived Raja was a different person, with different qualities and thought. They realised that the soul of a great Mahatma had entered the body of their Raja. Therefore, messengers were sent out to search for a human body hidden somewhere in lonely forests and caves and to burn it when found. They thought that if they did so, the new Raja might remain with them for a long time.

Sankara was acquiring all the experience of love with his queens. Maya is very powerful. In the midst of those queens, Sankara entirely forgot all about his promises to his disciples about his going back to them. The disciples began to search for him. They heard about the miraculous resurrection of Raja Amaruka. They immediately proceeded to the city and had an interview with the Raja. They sang a few philosophical songs which at once revived the memory of Sankara. The disciples immediately repaired to the place where the physical body of Sankara was kept hidden. By that time the messengers of the queen had found out the physical body and had just begun to set fire to it. The soul of Sankara just then entered his own body. Sankara prayed to Lord Hari to help him. There was a shower of rain immediately and that extinguished the flames.

Then Sankara returned to the residence of Mandana Misra. He resumed the old controversy and answered all the questions raised by Bharati satisfactorily. Mandana Misra gave all his property as a gift to Sri Sankara and Mandana was made to distribute it to the poor and the deserving. He then became a disciple of Sankara. Sankara initiated him into the holy order of Sannyasa and gave him the name of 'Sureswara Acharya'. Sureswara Acharya was the first Sannyasin who took charge of the Sringeri Mutt. Bharati also accompanied Sankara to Sringeri and there she is worshipped even today.

Sankara ascended the seat of omniscience after inviting Vedic scholars from all parts of India and answering their numerous questions. Sankara, by vanquishing all the religious opponents of his day—and they belonged to no less than seventy-two different schools—and establishing the superiority of the Vedic Dharma, had become the Jagadguru of all.

Sankara's success over the other religious sects was so complete that none of them have since been able to raise their head in the land. Most of them have disappeared altogether. After Sankara's time, although a few Acharyas have appeared, none of them have been able to vanquish those who differed from them as Sankara did and establish unquestioned supremacy.

Mother's funeral rites

Sankara received news that his mother was seriously ailing. He left his disciples and proceeded to Kaladi alone. His mother was then bedridden. Sankara touched her feet in reverence. He praised Lord Hari. Hari's messengers came.

Sankara's mother gave up her physical body and went along with those messengers to the abode of Hari.

Sankara encountered serious difficulties in performing the funeral rites of his mother. Usually, Sannyasins do not perform any of the rites or ceremonies which are enjoined on the householders. The Nambudiri Brahmins were all against Sankara. Sankara's relatives also did not help him. They did not come forward to assist him even in carrying the dead body to the place of cremation and refused to give fire for igniting the funeral pyre. At last Sankara determined to perform the funeral rites all alone. As he could not carry the entire dead body, he cut it into pieces and removed the pieces one by one to the backyard of the house. He then made a pyre there of stems of plantain trees and set fire to it by his Yogic power. Sankara wanted to teach the Nambudiris a lesson. He then made the local chief issue an edict that a corner should be set apart in each *Illam* or house of the Nambudiri Brahmins to burn the dead of the family and that they should cut the dead body into parts and then burn the same. This practice continues even today amongst Nambudiri Brahmins.

Sankara then returned to Sringeri. From there he went out on a tour through the eastern coast with a large number of followers. He preached his Advaita philosphy wherever he went. He established the Govardhana Mutt at Puri. He went to Kancheepuram and attacked the Shaktas. He purified the temples. He won over to his side the rulers of the Chola and the Pandya kingdoms. He went to Ujjain and put down the atrocities of the Bhairavas who were shedding human blood. He then proceeded to Dwaraka and established a Mutt there. He then travelled along the course of the Ganges and held religious controversies with great personages.

Sankara's end

Sankara proceeded to Kamarup—the present Guwahati—in Assam and held a controversy with Abhinava Gupta, the Shakta commentator, and won victory over him. Abhinava felt his defeat very keenly. He made Sankara suffer from a severe form of piles through black magic. Padmapada removed the evil effects of the black magic. Sankara became quite alright. He went to the Himalayas, built a Mutt at Joshi and a temple at Badri. He then proceeded to Kedarnath higher up in the Himalayas. He became one with the Linga in 820 A.D. in his thirty-second year.

Sringeri Mutt

In the north-west of the State of Mysore, nestling in the beautiful foot-hills of the Western Ghats, surrounded by virgin forests, lies the village of Sringeri and here Sankara established his first Mutt. The river Tunga—a branch of the river Tungabhadra—runs through the valley closely touching the walls of the temple; and its pure and limpid waters are as famous for drinking purposes as the waters of the Ganges are for bath (*Ganga Snanam, Tunga Panam*). Sringeri is a place of great sanctity and its beauty has to be seen to be appreciated. The Mutt is 'still going strong' as the phrase goes. The homage paid to the Mutt by countless aspirants and devotees is as much due to the greatness of illustrious men like Vidyaranya who have been at its head ever since its foundation as to the renown of the founder himself.

It may not be out of place to mention here that it took thirty years for the well-known Sanskrit professor Max Muller to translate the commentary on the Rig Veda, written by Vidyaranya, also known as Sayana. The learned professor, in his preface, says that not a single day passed in the thirty years without his devoting at least ten minutes on the translation. There is also a little interesting incident that when the manuscript was found to be illegible in some places, he got an authorised transcription from the first original still preserved in the Sringeri Mutt, through the influence of the then Maharaja of Mysore.

The famous holy shrine of Sri Sarada is an equal source of attraction to the devotees. Many are the Mutts and monasteries in India where holy men or their successors sit, and where Hindus from all parts of India gather, but none so great or so famous as Sringeri, the original seat of Adi Sankaracharya. The Sringeri Peetha is one of the oldest monasteries of the world flourishing for over twelve centuries now. It is the first of the four seats of learning established by Sankaracharya, the other three being Puri, Dwaraka and Joshi

Mutt, each one of them representing one of the four Vedas of the Hindus.

Sankara placed his four eminent disciples (Sureswara Acharya, Padmapada, Hastamalaka and Trotakacharya) in charge of the Sringeri Mutt, Jagannath Mutt, Dwaraka Mutt and Joshi Mutt respectively. The most famous Sannyasin in the succession of Gurus of the Sringeri Mutt was, of course, Vidyaranya, the great commentator on the Vedas and the father of the dynasty of Vijayanagar. He was the Dewan of Vijayanagaram. He became a Sannyasin about 1331 A.D. The eleven Sannyasins before Vidyaranya were Sankaracharya, Viswarupa, Nityabodhaghana, Jnanaghana, Jnanottama, Jnana Giri, Simha Girisvara, Isvara Tirtha, Narasimha Tirtha, Vidya Sankara Tirtha and Bharati Krishna Tirtha.

The historic and sacred pontifical throne of the Sringeri Mutt is known as Vyakhyana Simhaṣana or seat of learning. Tradition has it that this seat was given to the great Sankara by Sarasvati, the Goddess of Learning, in appreciation of the philosopher's vast scholarly erudition. Thirty-five Acharyas had sat on the pontifical throne before his present holiness in regular and uninterrupted succession.

Dasanami Sannyasins

Sankara organized ten definite orders of Sannyasins under the name 'Dasanamis' who add, at the end of their names, any one of the following ten suffixes: Saraśvati, Bharati, Puri (Sringeri Mutt); Tirtha, Asrama (Dwaraka Mutt); Giri, Parvata and Sagar (Joshi Mutt); Vana and Aranya (Govardhana Mutt).

The Paramahamsa represents the highest of these grades. It is possible to become a Paramahamsa by a long course of Vedantic study, meditation and Self-realisation. The Ati-varnashramis are beyond caste and order of life. They dine with all classes of people. Sankara's Sannyasins are to be found all over India.

Some anecdotes

Sankara was going along the street one day with his pupils to take bath in the Ganges when he met a Chandala who was also passing along the street with his dogs by his side. The disciples of Sankara shouted and asked the Chandala to clear off the road. The Chandala asked Sankara: "O venerable Guru! You are a preacher of Advaita Vedanta and yet you make a great difference between man and man. How can this be consistent with your teaching of Advaitism? Is Advaita only a theory?". Sankara was very much struck by the intelligent query of the Chandala. He thought within himself, "Lord Siva has assumed this form just to teach me a lesson". He composed then and there five Slokas called the 'Manisha Panchaka'. Every Sloka ends thus: "He who has learnt to look on the phenomena in the light of Advaita is my true Guru, be he a Chandala or be he a Brahmin".

* * *

In Kashi, a student was cramming the Sutras in Sanskrit grammar. He was repeating again and again "*Dukrin karane, Dukrin karane....*". Sankara heard it and was struck by the perseverance of the boy. He immediately sang a small poem, the famous *Bhaja Govindam* song, in order to teach the uselessness of such studies in the matter of the liberation of the soul. The meaning of the song is: "Worship Govinda, worship Govinda, worship Govinda, O fool! When you are about to die, the repetition of these Sanskrit Sutras will not save you".

* * *

Once some mischief-mongers offered meat and liquor to Sankara. Sankara touched those items with his right hand. The meat turned into apples and the liquor into milk.

* * *

A Kapalika came to Sankara and begged for his head as a gift. Sankara consented and asked the Kapalika to take his head when he was alone and absorbed in meditation. The Kapalika was just aiming with a big sword to sever the head of Sankara. Padmapada, the devoted disciple of Sankara came, caught hold of the arm of the Kapalika and killed him with his knife. Padmapada was a worshipper of Lord Narasimha. Lord Narasimha entered the body of Padmapada and killed the Kapalika.

Sankara's philosophy

Sankara wrote Bhashyas or commentaries on the Brahma Sutras, the Upanishads and the Gita. The Bhashya on the Brahma Sutras is called *Sareerik Bhashya.* Sankara wrote commentaries on *Sanat Sujatiya* and *Sahasranama Adhyaya.* It is usually said, "For learning logic and metaphysics, go to Sankara's commentaries; for gaining practical knowledge, which unfolds and strengthens devotion, go to his works such as *Viveka Chudamani, Atma Bodha, Aparoksha Anubhuti, Ananda Lahari, Atma-Anatma Viveka, Drik-Drishya Viveka* and *Upadesa Sahasri*". Sankara wrote innumerable original works in verses which are matchless in sweetness, melody and thought.

Sankara's supreme Brahman is Nirguna (without the Gunas), Nirakara (formless), Nirvisesha (without attributes) and Akarta (non-agent). He is above all needs and desires. Sankara says, "This Atman is self-evident. This Atman or Self is not established by proofs of the existence of the Self. It is not possible to deny this Atman, for it is the very essence of he who denies it. The Atman is the basis of all kinds of knowledge. The Self is within, the Self is without, the Self is before and the Self is behind. The Self is on the right hand, the Self is on the left, the Self is above and the Self is below".

Satyam-Jnanam-Anantam-Anandam are not separate attributes. They form the very essence of Brahman. Brahman cannot be described, because description implies distinction. Brahman cannot be distinguished from any other than He.

The objective world—the world of names and forms—has no independent existence. The Atman alone has real existence. The world is only Vyavaharika or phenomenal.

Sankara was the exponent of the Kevala Advaita philosophy. His teachings can be summed up in the following words:

Brahma Satyam Jagat Mithya,
Jeevo Brahmaiva Na Aparah

Brahman alone is real, this world is unreal; the Jiva is identical with Brahman.

Sankara preached Vivarta Vada. Just as the snake is superimposed on the rope, this world and this body are superimposed on Brahman or the Supreme Self. If you get a knowledge of the rope, the illusion of the snake will vanish. Even so, if you get a knowledge of Brahman, the illusion of the body and the world will vanish.

Sankara is the foremost among the master-minds and the giant souls which Mother India has produced. He was the expounder of the Advaita philosophy. Sankara was a giant metaphysician, a practical philosopher, an infallible logician, a dynamic personality and a stupendous moral and spiritual force. His grasping and elucidating powers knew no bounds. He was a fully developed Yogi, Jnani and Bhakta. He was a Karma Yogin of no mean order. He was a powerful magnet.

There is not one branch of knowledge which Sankara has left unexplored and which has not received the touch, polish and finish of his superhuman intellect. For Sankara and his works, we have a very high reverence. The loftiness, calmness and firmness of his mind, the impartiality with which he deals with various questions, his clearness of expression—all these make us revere the philosopher more and more. His teachings will continue to live as long as the sun shines.

Sankara's scholarly erudition and his masterly way of exposition of intricate philosophical problems have won the admiration of all the philosophical schools of the world at the present moment. Sankara was an intellectual genius, a profound philosopher, an able propagandist, a matchless preacher, a gifted poet and a great religious reformer. Perhaps, never in the history of any literature, a stupendous writer like him has been found. Even the Western scholars of the present day pay their homage and respects to him. Of all the ancient systems, that of Sankaracharya will be found to be the most congenial and the most easy of acceptance to the modern mind.

RAMANUJA

In the year 1017 A.D., Ramanuja was born in the village of Perumbudur, about twenty-five miles west of Madras. His father was Kesava Somayaji and his mother was Kantimathi, a very pious and virtuous lady. Ramanuja's Tamil name was Ilaya Perumal. Quite early in life, Ramanuja lost his father. Then he came to Kancheepuram to prosecute his study of the Vedas under one Yadavaprakasha, a teacher of Advaita philosophy.

Ramanuja was a very brilliant student. Yadavaprakasha's interpretations of Vedic texts were not quite up to his satisfaction. Ramanuja pointed out many mistakes in the exposition of his master. Sometimes he gave his own interpretations which were much liked by all the co-students. This made Yadavaprakasha very jealous of Ramanuja.

Yadavaprakasha made a plan to take away the life of Ramanuja. He arranged for Ramanuja and his cousin Govinda Bhatta—a fellow student—a pilgrimage to Varanasi. Govinda Bhatta, being a favourite student of Yadavaprakasha, came to know of the latter's plan while they were travelling. He at once apprised Ramanuja of the danger and helped him to escape. By the grace of God, Ramanuja escaped with the help of a hunter and his wife whom he accidentally met on the way.

About the end of the tenth century, the Visishtadvaita system of philosophy was well established in Southern India and the followers of this creed were in charge of important Vaishnavite temples at Kancheepuram, Srirangam, Tirupathi and other important places. The head of the important Vaishnavite institution was Yamunacharya, a great sage and profound scholar; and he was also the head of the Mutt at Srirangam. One of his disciples, by name Kanchipurna, was serving in the temple at Kancheepuram. Although a Sudra, Kanchipurna was so very pious and good that the people of the place had great respect and reverence for him. At present, there is a temple at Kancheepuram where Kanchipurna's image has been installed and where he is worshipped as a saint.

Young Ramanuja came under Kanchipurna's influence and had such reverence for him that he invited him to dinner in his house. Ramanuja's intention was to attend on Kanchipurna and personally serve him at dinner and himself take meals afterwards. Unfortunately, Kanchipurna came to dinner when Ramanuja was not at home, and took his meals being served by Ramanuja's wife. When Ramanuja returned home, he found the house washed and his wife bathing for having served meals to a Sudra. This irritated Ramanuja very much and turned him against his wife who was an orthodox lady of a different social ideal. After a few incidents of this nature, Ramanuja abandoned the life of a householder and became a Sannyasin.

About this time, Yamunacharya being very old, was on the look-out for a young person of good ability and character to take his place as head of the Mutt at Srirangam. He had already heard of Ramanuja through his disciples and made up his mind to instal Ramanuja in his place. He now sent for Ramanuja. By the time Ramanuja reached Srirangam, Yamunacharya was dead; and Ramanuja saw his body being taken by his followers to the cremation ground outside the village. Ramanuja followed them to the cremation ground. There he was informed that Yamunacharya, before his death, had left instructions that he had three wishes which Ramanuja was to be requested to fulfil, viz., that a Visishtadvaita Bhashya should be written for the Brahma Sutras of Vyasa which hitherto had been taught orally to the disciples of the Visishtadvaita philosophy and that the names of Parasara, the author of Vishnu Purana, and saint Sadagopa should be perpetuated. Ramanuja was deeply touched, and in the cremation ground itself, before the dead body of Yamunacharya, he made a solemn promise that, God willing, he would fulfil all the three wishes of Yamunacharya. Ramanuja lived for 120 years, and in the course of his long life, fully redeemed his promise by fulfilling all the three wishes of Yamunacharya.

After the death of Yamuna, his disciples at Srirangam and other places wanted Ramanuja to take Yamuna's place as the head of the Mutt at Srirangam. This was also the expressed wish of Yamuna. Accordingly, Ramanuja took his place and was duly installed with all the attendant ceremonies and celebrations as the head of the Visishtadvaita Mutt at Srirangam.

Ramanuja then proceeded to Thirukottiyur to take initiation from Nambi for Japa of the sacred Mantra of eight letters *Om Namo Narayanaya*. Somehow, Nambi was not willing to initiate Ramanuja easily. He made Ramanuja travel all the way from Srirangam to Madurai nearly eighteen times before he made up his mind to initiate him, and that too, only after exacting solemn promises of secrecy. Then Nambi duly initiated Ramanuja and said: "Ramanuja! Keep this Mantra a secret. This Mantra is a powerful one. Those who repeat this Mantra will attain salvation. Give it only to a worthy disciple previously tried". But Ramanuja had a very large heart. He was extremely compassionate and his love for humanity was unbounded. He wanted that every man should enjoy the eternal bliss of Lord Narayana. He realised that the Mantra was very powerful. He immediately called all people, irrespective of caste and creed, to assemble before the temple. He stood on top of the tower above the front gate of the temple, and shouted out the sacred Mantra to all of them at the top of his voice. Nambi, his Guru, came to know of this. He became furious. Ramanuja said: "O my beloved Guru! Please prescribe a suitable punishment for my wrong action". Ramanuja said: "I will gladly suffer the tortures of hell myself if millions of people could get salvation by hearing the Mantra through me". Nambi was very much pleased with Ramanuja and found out that he had a very large heart full of compassion. He embraced Ramanuja and blessed him. Having thus equipped himself with the necessary qualifications, Ramanuja succeeded Yamuna.

By this time, Ramanuja's fame had spread far and wide. He became a good controversialist. Then he wrote his commentary on the Brahma Sutras known as the *Sri Bhashya*. The Visishtadvaita system is an ancient one. It was expounded by Bodhayana in his Vritti, written about 400 B.C. It is the same as that expounded by Ramanuja; and Ramanuja followed

Bodhayana in his interpretations of the Brahma Sutras. Ramanuja's sect of Vaishnavas is called by the name *Sri Sampradaya.* Ramanuja wrote also three other books—*Vedanta Sara* (essence of Vedanta), *Vedanta Sangraha* (a resume of Vedanta) and *Vedanta Deepa* (the light of Vedanta).

Ramanuja travelled throughout the length and breadth of India to disseminate the path of devotion. He visited all the sacred places throughout India including Kashi, Kashmir and Badrinath. On his way back he visited the Tirupathi hills. There he found the Saivites and the Vaishnavites quarrelling with one another, one party contending that the image of the Lord in the Tirupathi hills was a Saivite one and the other party saying that it was a Vaishnavite one. Ramanuja proposed that they should leave it to the Lord Himself to decide the dispute. So they left the emblems of both Siva and Vishnu at the feet of the Lord, and after locking the door of the temple, both parties stayed outside on guard. In the morning, when they opened the doors, it was found that the image of the Lord was wearing the emblems of Vishnu, while the emblems of Siva were lying at its feet as left there the evening before. This decided that the temple was a Vaishnavite one and it has remained so ever since.

Ramanuja then visited all the Vaishnavite shrines in South India and finally reached Srirangam. Here he settled himself permanently and continued his labours of preaching the Visishtadvaita philosophy and writing books. Thousands of people flocked to him everyday to hear his lectures. He cleansed the temples, settled the rituals to be observed in them, and rectified many social evils which had crept into the community. He had a congregation of 700 Sannyasins, 74 dignitaries who held special offices of ministry, and thousands of holy men and women, who revered him as God. He converted lakhs of people to the path of Bhakti. He gave initiation even to washermen. He was now seventy years old, but was destined to live many more years, establish more Mutts, construct more temples and convert many more thousands of people.

The Chola king about this time was Kulothunga I and he was a staunch Saivite. He ordered Ramanuja to subscribe tc his faith in Siva and acknowledge Siva as the Supreme Lord.

Two of the disciples of Ramanuja, Kuresa and Mahapurna, donned the orange robes of Sannyasins and visited the court of Kulothunga I in place of Ramanuja. They argued there for the superiority of Vishnu. The monarch refused to hear them and had their eyes put out.

The two unfortunate people started for Srirangam—their native place. Mahapurna was a very old man, and unable to bear the pain, died on the way. Kuresa alone returned to Srirangam.

Meanwhile, Ramanuja, with a few followers, by rapid marches through day and night, reached the foot-hills of the Western Ghats, about forty miles west of Mysore. There, after great difficulties, he established himself and spent some years in preaching and converting people to the Visishtadvaita philosophy.

The king of the place was Bhatti Deva of the Hoysala dynasty. The Raja's daughter was possessed of some devil and nobody was able to cure her. Ramanuja succeeded in exorcizing the devil and the princess was restored to her former health. The king was very much pleased with Ramanuja and readily became his disciple and he was converted by Ramanuja into a Vaishnavite. Thereafter Ramanuja firmly established himself in the Mysore king's dominions, constructed a temple at Melkote, and created a strong Vaishnavite community there. The Pariahs or depressed classes (now called Harijans) of the place were of great service to Ramanuja; and Ramanuja gave them the right of entry inside the temple which he constructed at Melkote—on some fixed days and with some limited privileges—which they enjoy to this day.

Ramanuja constructed a few more Vishnu temples in and about Mysore, set up a strong Vaishnavite community and put them in charge of his disciples to continue his work and spread the Visishtadvaita philosophy and Vishnu worship throughout the king's dominions. Thus he continued his labours here for nearly twenty years and his followers numbered several thousands.

Meanwhile, Kulothunga Chola I, who persecuted Ramanuja, died. The followers of Ramanuja immediately communicated the news to Ramanuja and requested him to come back to Srirangam. Ramanuja himself longed to go back to his followers in Srirangam and worship in the temple there. But his new disciples and followers at Melkote and other places in Mysore would not let him go. So he constructed a temple for himself, installed therein his own image for worship by his disciples and followers, and left the place for Srirangam. He was welcomed by his friends and disciples at Srirangam. The successor to Kulothunga Chola I was a pro-Vaishnavite and Ramanuja was left undisturbed. Ramanuja continued his labours for thirty years more and closed his long active career after attaining the remarkable age of 120 years.

Ramanuja was the exponent of the Visishtadvaita philosophy or qualified non-dualism. Ramanuja's Brahman is Sa-visesha Brahman, i.e., Brahman with attributes. According to Ramanuja's teachings, Lord Narayana or Bhagavan is the Supreme Being; the individual soul is Chit; matter is Achit. Ramanuja regards the attributes as real and permanent, but subject to the control of Brahman. The attributes are called Prakaras or modes. Lord Narayana is the Ruler and Lord of the universe. The Jiva is His servant and worshipper. The Jiva should completely surrender himself to the Lord. The oneness of God is quite consistent with the existence of attributes, as the attributes or Shaktis depend upon God for their existence.

MADHVA

Madhvacharya was a great religious reformer and an orthodox commentator on the Brahma Sutras and the ten Upanishads. He was born in 1199 A.D. at Velali, a few miles from Udipi in the district of South Kanara in South India. He was a Tulu Brahmin by birth. He was born of Madhya Geha and Vedavati. Vedavati was a virtuous woman. Madhva is regarded as an incarnation of Vayu, the Wind-God. The father gave him the name Vasudeva.

Madhva distinguished himself in physical exercises and field games. He had a wonderful physique. He could wrestle, run, jump and swim. So people gave him the nickname *Bhima*. Madhva took to the study of the Vedas and the Vedangas and became well-versed in them. He took Sannyasa in his twenty-fifth year. Achyutaprakashacharya initiated him. Madhva was now known by the name Purna Prajna. Achyutaprakashacharya found that Madhva was a brilliant Sannyasin with efficient knowledge in Vedanta and other scriptures. He put Madhva as head of the Mutt in his place. Madhva received the name of Ananda Tirtha now. He went on an extensive tour in Southern and Northern India to preach his gospel of Bhakti. He made several converts. He went to Badrinarayan, and soon after his return, he wrote his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita and the Vedanta Sutras. He built several temples at Udipi, the principal centre of the Madhva sect. Most of the orthodox Madhvas try to go to Udipi at least once in their life.

Madhva had superhuman powers. He performed many miracles. He saved a boat which was caught in a storm. A boat which contained an image of Lord Krishna capsized. Madhva brought back the image from the ocean. During his tour, king Ishvara Deva in Maharashtra asked Madhva to work in building a dam. Madhva noticed that he had been unconsciously working for the king the whole day. Once he stilled the waves of the ocean when he went to take bath.

Madhvacharya is the great exponent of the Dvaita school of philosophy. His Vaishnavism is called *Sad-Vaishnavism* in order to distinguish it from the *Sri-Vaishnavism* of Ramanujacharya. According to his philosophy, the Supreme Being is Vishnu or Narayana. Every follower of the Madhva school should have a firm belief in the *Pancha-bheda*—five real and eternal distinctions—viz., the distinction between the Supreme Being and the individual soul, between spirit and matter, between one Jiva and another Jiva, between the Jiva and matter, between one piece of matter and another. The phenomenal world is real and eternal. The worship of Vishnu consists in (i) *Ankana*, marking the body with His symbols, (ii) *Namakarana*, giving the names of the Lord to children and (iii) *Bhajana*, singing His glories. Madhva laid much stress on constant practice of the remembrance of God (Smarana). He says, "Form a strong habit of remembering God. Then only it will be easy for you to remember Him at the moment of death". Madhva pointed out that when the Lord incarnated, no Prakrita Deha or material body was put on by Him. He prescribed a rigorous kind of fasting to his followers.

Renunciation, devotion and direct cognition of the Lord through meditation lead to the attainment of salvation. The aspirant should equip himself with the study of the Vedas, control of the senses, dispassion and perfect self-surrender, if he wants to have the vision of the Lord. These are some of the important teachings of Madhvacharya, the renowned exponent of the dualistic school of philosophy.

VALLABHA

Vallabhacharya, the founder of the Vaishnavite cult of Rajasthan and Gujarat, was born of Lakshmana Bhatta and Illamma in 1479 A.D. at Champaranya, Raipur, in Madhya Pradesh. He was a Telugu Brahmin and a contemporary of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. He is regarded as an Avatara of Agni.

Vallabha lost his father when he was eleven years of age. He completed, in his twelfth year, his study of the Vedas, the six Darshanas and the eighteen Puranas at Varanasi. From Varanasi he went to Brindavan. Then he visited all the sacred places in India.

Vallabha attended the court of Raja Krishna Deva at Vijayanagar and defeated all the famous Pundits of the court. The Raja was very much pleased with Vallabha for his genius and learning, showered on him gifts of gold and other wealth, and invested him with the title of 'Vaishnavacharya'. Vallabha's fame and influence quickly increased. From Vijayanagar Vallabha went to Ujjain and other places.

Vallabha was married at Varanasi and his wife's name was Mahalakshmi. He had two sons.

The important works of Vallabha are *Vyasa Sutra Bhashya, Jaimini Sutra Bhasya, Bhagavata Tika Subodhini, Pushti Pravala Maryada* and *Siddhanta Rahasya.* All these books are in Sanskrit. Vallabha has written many books in Brij Bhasha also.

Vallabha's followers have built a temple on the spot of his birth at Champaranya. This temple is very popular and is much visited by them as a place of pilgrimage.

Vallabha spent his last days at Varanasi. He thought that his life's mission had been accomplished. He went one day to bathe in the Ganges at Hanuman Ghat. There the people saw a brilliant light ascending the sky from the earth. In the presence of a host of spectators he ascended the sky and disappeared. This took place in 1531 A.D. in Vallabha's fifty-second year.

Vallabhacharya was the exponent of pure Monism or the Shuddhadvaita school of philosophy. Sri Krishna is the highest Brahman. His body consists of Satchidananda. He is called Purushottama. Vallabha's followers worship Bala Krishna (Vatsalya Bhava). Vallabha laid great stress on Pushti (grace) and Bhakti (devotion). Maha Pushti is the highest grace or Anugraha which helps the aspirant to attain Godhead. Things come out of the Akshara (Satchidananda) like sparks from fire. These are his salient teachings.

NIMBARKA

There lived a great ascetic named Aruna Muni in Vaiduryapattnam, on the banks of the Godavari, in Andhra Pradesh in Southern India. He had a pious wife by name Jayanti Devi. Sri Nimbarka was born of Aruna Muni and Jayanti Devi. He flourished in the eleventh century A.D.

At the time of the Namakarana Samskara, the learned Brahmins gave the boy the name Niyamanandacharya. Nimbarka was also known by the names Aruna Rishi and Haripriyacharya.

Aruna Muni and Jayanti Devi performed their son's sacred thread ceremony and sent him to Rishikul for learning the Vedas, Vedangas, Darshanas, etc. Niyamanandacharya mastered the scriptures in a short time. He was a mighty genius. People from all parts of India came to see this wonderful boy.

When Niyamanandacharya was in his teens, Brahma, the Creator, came to the Ashram of Aruna Muni in the disguise of a Sannyasin. The sun was about to set. The Muni had been out. The Sannyasin asked the wife of the Muni for something to eat. The food had been exhausted. The Muni's wife remained silent. The Sannyasin was about to leave the Ashram.

Niyamanandacharya said to his mother, "Dear mother! A Sannyasin should not be sent away without food. We will have to suffer for violating Atithi Dharma". The mother said, "Dear son! Your father has gone out. I have neither fruits nor roots. Moreover, there is no time for me to prepare any food. It is sunset. Sannyasins do not take their meals after sunset".

Niyamanandacharya said to the Sannyasin, "I shall bring quickly roots and fruits from the forest. I guarantee that the sun will not set till you finish your meals". Niyamanandacharya placed his Sudarshana Chakra on a Nim tree in the Ashram where it shone like the sun. Brahma, who was in the guise of the Sannyasin, was struck with amazement. In a few minutes Nimbarka returned with roots and fruits and gave them to his mother, who served them to the Sannyasin with intense devotion. As soon as the Sannyasin finished his meals, Nimbarka removed the Sudarshana Chakra from the Nim tree. It was at once pitch dark. One quarter of the night had passed. The Sannyasin, who was Brahma, conferred on the boy the name '*Nimbarka*' (*Nim*—Neem tree; *Arka*—Surya or the sun). Since then he has been called Sri Nimbarkacharya.

Sri Nimbarkacharya is considered to be an incarnation of Lord Hari's weapon Sudarshana Chakra or discus.

There are four kinds of Avataras: (i) Purna (full) e.g., Lord Krishna, Lord Rama. (ii) Kala (not all-full) e.g., Matsya, Varaha, Hamsa, etc. (iii) Amsa (part) e.g., Jada Bharata, Nara Narayana, etc. (iv) Amsamsa (part of the part) e.g., Sri Sankara, Sri Ramanuja, Sri Nimbarka, etc.

In Vishnu Yana, the spiritual lineage of Sri Nimbarkacharya is given as follows: "The sacred Gopala Mantra of eighteen letters sprang from the lotus mouth of Sri Narayana. It was given to Hamsa Bhagavan. Hamsa Bhagavan in turn initiated the Kumaras who revealed this Mantra to Rishi Narada. Narada taught this to his disciple Sri Nimbarka. Nimbarka gave this Mantra to his disciple Srinivasacharya".

Sri Nimbarkacharya was the embodiment of mercy, piety, love, kindness, liberality and other divine qualities. He did rigorous austerities at Neemgram and had Darshan of Lord Krishna in that place. In that village only Nimbarka had exhibited his miracle when Brahma came for Bhiksha as a Sannyasin. Another holy place of the Nimbarka sect is Salembabad in Rajasthan. A big Mahant lives here. There is a temple of Nimbarka here.

Brindavan, Nandgram, Barsana, Govardhan and Neemgram are the chief Kshetras or holy lands of the followers of Nimbarkacharya. Parikrama of the 168 miles of Brij Bhumi is their foremost duty. To pay visits on different occasions to Sri Nimbarka's temple in Neemgram, two miles from Govardhan, is their Sampradayik duty.

The Nimbarka sect is found mostly in Brij Bhumi, viz., Brindavan, Nandigram, Barsana, Govardhan, etc. Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bharatpur, Gwalior, Burdwan and Okara are its centres. The Nimbarka followers are also to be found in Central India, Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal.

The Dvaitadvaita philosophy

Sri Nimbarkacharya wrote the following books: *Vedanta Parijat Saurabh*, a commentary on the Brahma Sutras; a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita; *Sadachar Prakash*, a treatise on Karma Kanda; *Rahasya Shodasi*, an explanation of the Sri Gopala Mantra in verses; *Prapanna Kalpa Valli*, an explanation of the Sri Mukunda Mantra in verses; *Prapatti Chintamani*, a treatise pertaining to supreme refuge; *Prata Smarana Stotram*, a devotional hymn; *Dasa Sloki* or *Kama Dhenu*, the ten nectarine verses; and *Savisesh Nirvisesh Sri Krishna Stavam*.

Sri Nimbarkacharya was the exponent of the Dvaitadvaita school of philosophy. Followers of this cult worship Sri Radha and Krishna. *Bhagavata* is the most important scripture for them. Jiva and the world are both separate from, and identical with, Brahman. The followers of this school are even now found in Mathura and Brindavan.

Sankara was the exponent of the Kevala Advaita philosophy, Ramanuja of the Visishtadvaita philosophy, Madhvacharya of the Dvaita philosophy, Vallabhacharya of the Suddhadvaita philosophy and Nimbarkacharya of the Dvaitadvaita philosophy. All were great souls. We cannot say that Sankara was greater than Ramanuja or Vallabha was greater than Nimbarka. All were Avatara Purushas. Each one incarnated on this earth to complete a definite mission, to preach and propagate a certain doctrine, which was necessary to help the growth of a certain type of people who flourished at a certain period, who were in a certain stage of devotion. All schools of philosophy are necessary. Each philosophy is best suited to a certain type of people.

All cannot grasp the highest Kevala Advaita philosophy of Sankara all at once. The mind has to be disciplined properly before it is rendered a fit instrument to grasp the tenets of Sankara's Advaita Vedanta.

Salutations and adorations to all Acharyas! Glory to the Acharyas! May their blessings be upon us all!

RAMANANDA

Sri Ramananda, a great pioneer of the Bhakti movement in Hindustan, was fifth in apostolic succession to Sri Ramanuja, a disciple of Yamuna Muni and an exponent of the Visishtadvaita philosophy or qualified monism. Ramananda was born in Prayag, the modern Allahabad, in 1299 A.D. He was born of Punyasadan, a Kanyakubja Brahmin and Sushila. He attained Mahasamadhi in 1410 A.D.

Sri Ramananda was a great Vaishnava Acharya and a devotee. His followers worship Lord Rama. They are known as Ramanandis or Ramavats. The mendicant members of the sect are known as Vairagis.

Ramananda had a very large heart. He admitted disciples of every caste. He was endowed with precocious intelligence. He was sent to Varanasi for his education. He became a disciple of Sri Raghavananda, a prominent teacher of the Vaishnava school of Ramanuja. Raghavananda belonged to the orthodox school of Vaishnavism. But Ramananda was very catholic and liberal. He was above caste prejudices and ideas of Brahmin superiority. He embraced all who were devotees of Lord Hari. He recognised the equality of all men. He opened the gates of heaven to every caste, creed and colour. He taught everybody everywhere. He had a severe controversy with his Guru Raghavananda and had to leave him on account of his own lack of Vaishnavite orthodoxy. Ramananda said, "Let no one ask a man's caste or with whom he eats. If a man has devotion for Lord Vishnu, he becomes Vishnu's own".

Ramananda admitted all, high and low alike, into his Satsang. Among his twelve disciples, there were Brahmins, a Mussalman, a weaver, a Rajput, a Jat, a barber, a cobbler and two women. The twelve disciples were: Kabir, the weaver; Raidas, the cobbler; Pipa, the Rajput king; Dhanna, the Jat;

Sena, the barber; Narhariyananda, Sursurananda, Sukhananda, Bhavananda and Anantananda; and Padmavati and Surasari, two lady disciples.

Ramananda's disciples laid great emphasis on two basic principles, viz., that perfect devotion consists of perfect love towards God and that all servants of God are brothers.

Among the twelve disciples of Ramananda, Kabir, Sena and Raidas founded branch-sects of their own.

Ramananda imbibed the Vaishnavite philosophy of Sri Ramanuja, but he disseminated Bhakti towards Rama and Sita which appealed more to the masses.

The initiatory Mantras of the sect are *Sri Ram* and *Om Ram Ramaya Namah*. The Ramanandis' marks on the forehead are the same as those of the followers of Ramanuja, except that the red perpendicular line on the forehead is varied in shape and extent, and is generally narrower.

The followers of Ramananda are numerous in Gangetic India. They encompass the whole of the country along the banks of the Ganga and the Yamuna.

GAURANGA

Birth and parentage

Pundit Jagannath Misra, alias Purandar Misra, a pious Brahmin of the Vaidik sub-caste, had migrated from Sylhet and settled at Nadia or Nabadwip, a city of learned men in the Nabadwip district of West Bengal, situated on the river Ganges, seventy-five miles north of Calcutta. Jagannath Misra's wife was Sachi Devi, daughter of the scholar Nilamber Chakravarti. She also was a pious lady. A son was born to Jagannath Misra and Sachi on the night of the full moon, on 4th February, 1486 A.D., at Nabadwip.

The newborn child was named Viswambar. He was the tenth child of Jagannath Misra and Sachi Devi. The first eight—all daughters—died soon after their birth. The ninth was Viswarup, a son. He abandoned the world at sixteen when he was being forced to marry and entered a monastery in South India. The women, thinking that Sachi had lost many children, gave the tenth child, Viswambar, the bitter name of Nimai (derived from the name of the Neem tree) as a protection against all evil influences. The neighbours called him *Gaur* or *Gaur-Hari* or *Gauranga* (fair-complexioned) on account of his marvellous beauty. *Gaur* means fair and *Anga* means body; and they called him *Gaur-Hari*, because he was so fond of the name 'Hari' that nothing could soothe him, when he cried during childhood, save Hari's name.

Boyhood and studies

Gauranga studied logic at the school of Vasudev Sarvabhauma, a reputed professor of Nyaya. The extraordinary intellect of Gauranga attracted the attention of Raghunath, author of the famous book on logic called *Didheeti.* Raghunath thought within himself that he was the most intelligent youth in the world. He thought that he was more intelligent than his teacher Sarvabhauma. Raghunath's one great ambition was that he should be the foremost man of learning in the whole world.

But, when he found that Gauranga, though much younger than himself, was more intelligent and learned, he began to lose hope. His heart was filled with fear. Gauranga was at that time writing a commentary on Nyaya. This made Raghunath more nervous. Raghunath wanted to see the commentary of Gauranga. But he doubted whether Gauranga would consent to show it to him. Anyhow Raghunath requested Gauranga to show him his commentary on Nyaya. Gauranga readily consented to read it to Raghunath. When they were crossing the river by boat, Gauranga read out his commentary to Raghunath. Raghunath found that Gauranga's commentary was a masterly original exposition. Raghunath's hopes of occupying the first place in the world as professor of Nyaya were blasted. He wept bitterly. Gauranga asked, "Brother Raghunath, what is the matter with you? Why do you weep? I shall console you". Raghunath spoke out the truth: "Brother Gauranga, I have a strong ambition that I should attain the first place in the whole world as a professor of Nyaya. With this hope I have written a book on Nyaya thinking that it will beat out all the existing books. But my hope is entirely gone now, because your book really excels my book. It is concise, clear and original. It is indeed a scholarly production. This is the reason why I wept".

Gauranga also burst into tears. He said to Raghunath: "Is that all? Then do not weep, my dear brother. Nyaya is after all a dry philosophy. I will not be benefited much". He threw the manuscript into the river. From that moment he gave up the study of Nyaya. Look at the magnanimous heart of Gauranga! Gauranga's *Nyaya* was lost to the world. *Didheeti* of Raghunath became the first authority on Nyaya.

Gauranga mastered all branches of Sanskrit learning such as grammar, logic, literature, rhetoric, philosophy and theology. He developed marvellous talents. He was a genius. He himself started a *Tol* or place of learning. He was then sixteen years old and he was the youngest professor to be in charge of a *Tol*.

Gauranga was kind and compassionate. He was pure and gentle. He was sweet and loving. He was humane and sympathetic. He was a friend of the poor. He lived with them, served them and cheered them. He was very simple in his life.

Death of Gauranga's father

While Gauranga was still a student, his father died. Gauranga then married Lakshmi, the daughter of Vallabhacharya. He excelled all the Pundits and defeated even a reputed scholar of another province. He made a tour of the eastern region of Bengal and received many valuable gifts from pious and generous-hearted householders. On his return he heard that his wife had died of snake-bite during his absence. He then married Vishnupriya. He entertained pupils and taught them. He became proud of his vast erudition.

A turning point in Gauranga's life

In 1509, Gauranga went on a pilgrimage to Gaya with his companions. Here he met Isvar Puri, a Sannyasin of the order of Madhvacharya, and took him as his Guru. A marvellous change of life now came over Gauranga. He became a devotee of Lord Krishna. His pride of learning entirely vanished. He shouted, "Krishna, Krishna! Hari Bol, Hari Bol!". He laughed, wept, jumped, danced in ecstasy, fell on the ground and rolled in the dust. When he was in an ecstatic mood, he never ate or drank.

Gauranga proceeded to witness the footprints of Lord Krishna in the Gadadhar temple. He stood before the footprints motionless as a statue. He became absorbed in meditation. Tears gushed out of his eyes in continuous stream. His cloth was drenched with tears. He was about to fall down. Isvar Puri rushed forward and supported him. Gradually Gauranga came back to consciousness. He spoke to Isvar Puri: "Oh venerable Guru, have mercy on me. Extricate me from the quagmire of Samsara. Initiate me into the mysteries of Radha's love for Krishna. Let me develop pure Prem for Lord Krishna. Let me drink the nectar of Krishna-prema-rasa".

Isvar Puri then gave Gauranga the ten-lettered Mantra of Lord Krishna. Purva Raga dawned in the heart of Gauranga. He always remained in a meditative mood. He forgot to take his food. Tears trickled down his eyes. He swooned sometimes. He muttered again and again, "Lord Krishna, my

Father! Where art Thou? I cannot live without Thee. Thou art my sole refuge, my solace. Thou art my real father, mother, friend, relative and Guru. Reveal Thy form to me always". Sometimes Gauranga would gaze with vacant eyes. Sometimes he would sit in the position of meditation. He tried to conceal his silent tears from his companions. Sometimes he was unconscious of his surroundings. Gauranga wanted to go to Brindavan, but his companions forcibly took him back to Nabadwip.

Nitai

Nitai alias Nityananda was a Brahmin by birth. He took to the ascetic life at the age of twelve. He wandered about in quest of Krishna. He resided at Brindavan for sometime, but could not find out his Krishna. Gauranga took Nityananda to his own house and introduced him to his mother: "Mother, here is another son of yours. He is my elder brother. The lost Viswarup has come back to you now. Take him as your Viswarup". Sachi said to Nitai: "Child, come. Take care of your younger brother. Protect him. He is careless and thoughtless. Now I need not be anxious about him. Sit down, my child. Take your food and be happy".

Nityananda conducted Sankirtan in various places. Nabadwip resounded with Hari Nama. Nitai spent whole nights in singing the praises of Radha and Krishna. Religious processions were frequently arranged in which the devotees, headed by Gauranga and Nityananda, went dancing and singing through the streets or gathered in the courtyards of houses.

Gauranga was an embodiment of love. He lived, moved and had his being in love. His speech was full of love. He radiated love to all. His touch was a magnetism of love. He sang in love. He breathed in love. He walked in love. He showed by practice how God should be loved. He taught little by precept, but more by example. If he simply uttered one word, "You will be blessed with Bhakti", it was quite sufficient to throw a man into Samadhi and fill his heart with Prem. Such was Gauranga's power.

When Gauranga passed along the streets and roads, his powerful Prem current influenced and overpowered thousands.

They uttered irresistibly "Hari Bol! Hari Bol!" and danced in ecstasy.

Gauranga becomes a Sannyasin

The learned and the orthodox began to hate and oppose Gauranga. But Gauranga stood adamant. He converted only a few persons. He resolved to become a Sannyasin for their salvation. He thought within himself: "As I must get salvation for all these proud scholars and orthodox householders, I must become a Sannyasin. They will undoubtedly bow to me when they see me as a Sannyasin, and thus they will be purified, and their hearts will be filled with devotion. There is no other way of securing emancipation for them".

So, at the age of twenty-four, Gauranga got himself initiated by Swami Keshava Bharati under the name of 'Krishna Chaitanya', usually shortened into 'Chaitanya'. His mother, the tender-hearted Sachi, was heartbroken. But Chaitanya consoled her in every possible way and carried out her wishes. He bore deep love and reverence for his mother till the end of his life.

Chaitanya was extremely dispassionate. He abandoned all sorts of sensual pleasures as poison. He was very strict in observing the rules of Sannyasa. He declined to grant an interview to Raja Pratap Rudra of Orissa, because it is a great sin for a Sannyasin to see a king. It is as sinful as looking at a woman. If a Sannyasin sees a Raja or a king, gradually he will be attached to the Raja. As the mind has the habit of imitating, the Sannyasin also will begin to lead a life of luxury and have a downfall eventually. That is the reason why a Sannyasin is prohibited from seeing a Raja. Gauranga never saw a woman in the face. He did not allow any woman to approach him. He slept on the ground with bare body.

Gauranga was a great Vaishnavite preacher. He disseminated the doctrines and principles of Vaishnavism far and wide. Nityananda, Sanatan, Rupa, Swarup Damodar, Advaitacharya, Śribas, Haridas, Murari, Gadadhar and others helped Chaitanya in his mission.

Conversion of Jagai and Madhai

Jagai and Madhai of Nabadwip were the most abandoned of sinners and the worst of criminals ever known to history. They were brothers. They were the Kotwals of Nabadwip. They plundered the rich, outraged the modesty of women and committed murders on the slightest provocation. There was no heinous crime on earth which those brothers had not committed. Though Brahmins by caste, they were inveterate drunkards.

Chaitanya and Nitai undertook the serious task of reclaiming the two brothers. Chaitanya proposed to his devotees that they should go to the tent of Jagai and Madhai, doing Kirtan all the way, and then give *Hari Nam* to them.

Chaitanya and his devotees appeared in the streets and started the Sankirtan. Nitai was at the head of the party. He led the party to the camp of Jagai and Madhai. He then came face to face with the two brothers. Nitai said, "Pray, dear brothers, take Krishna's name and serve Krishna, for He is the Supreme Lord". This exhortation inflamed Madhai, the stronger of the two. Madhai pelted Nitai with the broken neck of an earthen jar and inflicted a gaping wound in his forehead. Blood gushed from the wound. Nitai pressed the wound with both hands to stop the gush. Madhai picked another piece of the same jar and wanted to throw it on the head of Nitai. Jagai caught hold of Madhai's arms and remonstrated with him: "Hold Madhai. You are very cruel. What is the merit of killing a Sannyasin? It will do you no good".

News was conveyed to Gauranga, who was behind in the Kirtan party, that Jagai and Madhai were killing Nitai. Gauranga immediately ran to the spot where Nitai stood wounded. He took his own cloth and wrapped it round the forehead of Nitai to stop the bleeding. He then embraced Jagai for the good he had rendered to Nitai by checking Madhai from attacking Nitai again. Jagai fell down in a state of trance. Madhai was in a state of despair. He lost all power of speech. He prostrated at the feet of Gauranga: "O Lord, I am a great sinner. Have mercy on me". Gauranga asked Madhai to go to Nitai and seek his pardon. Madhai apologized to Nitai. Nitai pardoned Madhai and embraced him. Madhai also, like his brother, fell down in a state of trance.

Afterwards those brothers became holy saints, and as beloved of the world as they were hated and dreaded in their earlier days for their brutality. They atoned for their past misdeeds by going over on their knees in utter humility before everybody who went to the river for bathing and by doing for them all sorts of menial services. They prepared, spade in hand, a bathing Ghat which is still known by the name of "Madhai's Ghat" at Nabadwip.

Talks to a washerman

Gauranga with his companions came to a washerman who was beating the clothes upon a piece of plank. He asked the washerman to say 'Hari Bol!'. The washerman thought that the mendicants had come to beg alms from him. He said to Gauranga. "Oh mendicant, I am very poor. I have nothing to give you". Gauranga said, "I do not want anything from you. Say 'Hari Bol!' at least once". The washerman refused. He thought he would be required to pay something to the mendicant. He said, "I am very poor. I cannot give up beating the cloth in order to utter the Name you have given to me". Gauranga said, "I shall do the beating of the cloth. Please say, 'Hari Bol!' ". The washerman said, 'Hari Bol!'. Then Gauranga asked him to repeat the same twice. The washerman repeated twice. Then the fire of devotion started. The washerman repeated the name unasked. He began to dance in ecstasy raising both his hands high.

The wife of the washerman brought some food to the washerman. She saw her husband dancing with uplifted hands uttering: "Hari Bol! Hari Bol!". She also noticed that her husband had no consciousness of his surroundings. She tried to rouse him by calling him loudly but in vain. She was frightened. She ran to the village and said to the relatives and neighbours, "A ghost has taken possession of my husband. Please help me. Drive away the ghost from him". They all proceeded immediately to see the washerman. He was still dancing in ecstasy. They were afraid to go near him. At last a bold man caught hold of the washerman and tried to stop his dancing. He too caught the contagion and began to dance with the washerman uttering, "Hari Bol! Hari Bol!". He embraced the onlookers. They too caught the contagion and danced in ecstasy. The people of the whole village were affected. Gauranga enjoyed the scene for some time and left the place.

Pilgrimages

Chaitanya, along with his friend Nityananda, proceeded towards Orissa. He preached Vaishnavism wherever he went and held Sankirtan. He attracted thousands of people wherever he went. He stayed for some time at Puri and then proceeded to the South. Gauranga visited the Tirupathi hills, Kancheepuram and the famous Srirangam on the banks of the Cauvery. From Srirangam he proceeded to Madurai, Rameswaram and Kanyakumari. He visited also Udipi, Pandharpur and Nasik. He visited Brindavan. He bathed in the Yamuna and in several sacred pools and visited the various shrines for worship. He prayed and danced in ecstasy to his heart's content. He also visited Nabadwip, his birthplace. At last Gauranga returned to Puri and settled there. He spent his remaining days at Puri only. Disciples and admirers from Bengal, Brindavan and various other places came to Puri to pay their respects to Gauranga. Gauranga held Kirtan and religious discourses daily.

Miracle at Puri

At Puri a miracle happened. During the car festival, the car of Jagannath did not move. All the pilgrims tried their combined strength. It proved futile. The gigantic elephants of the Raja of Puri also failed to move the car. All were in a stage of suspense and dilemma. Gauranga came just then. He pushed the car by his head and the car moved at once. All the pilgrims and devotees rent the air with the sound 'Hari Bol!'.

Conversion of Sarvabhauma

Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya was a great Vedantic scholar. Once Chaitanya went in an ecstatic mood to the temple of Jagannath. He rushed to embrace the image, but fell down on the ground in a deep swoon. The guard was about to beat Gauranga. The learned scholar Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, the minister of King Pratap Rudra of Orissa, removed Chaitanya to his house. His students carried Gauranga on their shoulders and put him down on a clean spot in the house. The devotees uttered loudly the name of 'Hari' in the ears of Gauranga. Gauranga came back to consciousness.

Sarvabhauma thought that Gauranga was a young man without any control of passion and knowledge of Vedanta. He did not like Kirtan and Nritya. He desired to re-initiate Gauranga. Gauranga humbly listened to Sarvabhauma for many days. Sarvabhauma expounded the following verse in nine different ways. Chaitanya showed his skill in Sanskrit and expounded the same verse in sixty-one different ways. Sarvabhauma was struck with wonder. The verse runs:

"Atmaramascha Munayo Nigranthapi Urukrame,
Kurvanty Ahaitukim Bhaktim Ithambhuta Guno Hari"

"Hari's qualities are so charming that the Atmarama Yogis—though they are Nigranthas (i.e., outside the influence of illusion or Shastraic injunctions)—become contemplative and are attracted by the same into adoring the Urukrama Hari with selfless love and devotion."

Sarvabhauma had neither devotion nor realisation. He was only a dry learned Pundit. Gauranga was a great scholar and yet he was humble. He would never indulge in such talks as were calculated to wound the feelings of others. He would never feel a sense of elation if he got victory in his debates. Gauranga eventually converted Sarvabhauma to his faith and criticised his arguments one by one. Gauranga embraced Sarvabhauma. Sarvabhauma fainted in an ecstasy of divine joy. He then rose and danced. He prostrated at the feet of Gauranga and said, "Oh venerable Master! Logic had made my heart as hard as iron. I had no devotion. Thou hast melted me. Salutations unto thee, O powerful Lord!".

Lord Gauranga converted all the leaders of Advaita and the heads of the Vaishnavas who came under his fold. Prakasananda, the Advaitacharya of Varanasi, was also converted. The ministers of the King of Gour were subjugated. Kazi, the Governor, was conquered. The King of Orissa became Gauranga's ardent and devoted disciple. He recognised Gauranga as an Avatara of Lord Krishna.

Healing a leper

Vasudeva was a humble, pious and good-natured

Brahmin. He suffered from leprosy—a loathsome disease. He was forced to live apart from his friends and relatives on account of the abominable stench emitted by his body. He used to pick up the maggots that dropped from his sores and put them back in their place. Vasudeva had extreme compassion and equal vision. He believed that all living creatures had an equal right to live and that he had no right to deprive them (the worms) of their natural food. What a magnanimous soul with a wonderful soft heart!

Vasudeva lived in the vicinity of the temple of Kurma at Jagannath. At night he heard of Chaitanya's arrival in the temple of Kurma. Next morning he proceeded to the temple to see him. He learnt that the Master had left the place half an hour earlier. On hearing this he fell down in a faint from disappointment and sorrow, exclaiming as he fell, "O Lord Krishna, hast Thou forsaken me?".

Chaitanya, who was then passing along the road, heard the cry of Vasudeva and ran towards the temple. He lifted the leper in his arms and embraced him, and lo! the leprosy disappeared and the body became sound and beautiful. Vasudeva said, "Oh Lord! Thou hast embraced me! All people fled from me due to the stench of my body. I came here to pay my respects to Thee and see Thy lotus feet. Certainly I did not come here with any idea of being healed. The loathsome malady taught me to be humble and compassionate and to remember the Lord at all times. But a healthy body will again generate pride and vanity and I will forget the Lord".

Chaitanya consoled him and said, "O Vasudeva! My child! You have the grace of Lord Krishna. You will never again be puffed up with vanity and pride. Lord Krishna has already accepted you on account of your extreme humility and compassion towards all living creatures and even to those worms which fed on your body. Repeat Lord Krishna's Name and save men by making them also repeat Krishna's Name".

Kirtan at the residence of Sreebas

Pundit Sreebas was a sincere devotee of Gauranga. The first Kirtan party was formed in the courtyard of Sreebas's house. It was there that the Kirtan was usually held.

Chaitanya Bhagavata was written by Sreebas's grandson in his house.

There was a grand Kirtan in the house of Sreebas one night. Gauranga and the Bhaktas were dancing in great joy. Now a maid-servant entered the courtyard and made a sign to Sreebas to follow her. Sreebas left the Kirtan and went inside the house. Sreebas's only son was seriously ailing from cholera. Sreebas saw now that his son was in a dying condition. His wife was weeping. Sreebas told her, "Do not weep. This will disturb the joy of our Lord. It is a great fortune that our son is dying when Hari's Kirtan is being done in the house". In a few minutes the soul of the boy left the body. Sreebas joined in the Kirtan and danced in joy. He was not a bit affected. The matter could not be kept secret for a long time. Anyhow it reached the ears of a Kirtanist. He stopped the Kirtan. Another heard the news. He also stopped the Kirtan and wanted to see the condition of Sreebas. Gradually the Kirtanists stopped one by one. Gauranga also stopped the Kirtan and said: "How is it that I do not experience much joy today? Has anything serious happened today?". He looked at Sreebas with a pained heart.

Sreebas replied, "Can I have any danger when the Lord is doing Kirtan in my house?". Another devotee said, "It is true, my Lord, a great calamity has occurred. Pundit Sreebas's son is dead". Chaitanya said, "His son dead! When?". The devotee replied, "He died some six or seven hours ago". Chaitanya burst into tears. He said, "Sreebas, bring the child before me". The body of the child was brought before Gauranga in the courtyard. Gauranga addressed the dead child and commanded him to speak. The boy spoke: "I am leaving this body for a better existence. O Lord, may my soul cling to Thy lotus feet!". The soul again left the body of the child. Gauranga then said to Sreebas and his wife Malinee: "I and Nityananda will take the place of your departed child. Be not troubled. Be not anxious". What a large and sympathetic heart Gauranga had!

Six-handed Divinity

The followers of Chaitanya regard Chaitanya as a six-handed Divinity. It is said that he showed his form with six hands to Sarvabhauma, Ramananda Ray and Nitai, the first two hands provided with bow and arrow, the second two with a flute in the act of playing upon it and the last two with Danda and Kamandalu. By this manifestation Chaitanya made Nitai understand that he was Rama as well as Krishna.

Jumping into the sea

When Gauranga was in a fit of devotional ecstasy, he jumped into the blue sea at Puri. He imagined that the blue sea was the Yamuna. He wanted to join in the frolics of the Gopis of Brindavan. As his body was in an emaciated condition, owing to constant fasts and vigils, it floated on the water and fell into the net of a fisherman. It was night. The fisherman was extremely glad as he felt that the net was very heavy. He thought that he had caught a big Brobdingnagian fish. He dragged the net to the shore with difficulty. He found in the net a human corpse instead of a big fish. He was disappointed. The corpse made a faint sound. The fisherman took it for a ghost or hobgoblin. He was greatly frightened. He slowly walked along the shore with trembling feet. Swaroopa and Ramananda, who were searching for their master from sunset, met the fisherman. Swaroopa asked him if he had seen Gauranga Deva anywhere. The fisherman narrated his story. Then Swaroopa and Ramananda hurried to the place where the net was lying. They removed their Master from the net and placed him on the ground. They sang the name of Hari loudly. Gauranga came back to consciousness.

His last words

Lord Gauranga said, "Listen, Swaroopa and Ramananda Raj! The chanting of Krishna's Name is the chief means of attaining Krishna's feet in the Kali Yuga. Sankirtan of the Name is the supreme healer in the Iron Age. Sankirtan tantamounts to Vedic sacrifice. Sankirtan destroys sins and purifies the heart and creates Bhakti. Chant the name while sitting, standing, walking, eating, in bed and everywhere. The Name is omnipotent. You can repeat the Name at any place, at any time.

"Listen, Swaroopa and Ramananda! I tell you about the mental attitude with which the Name should be recited.

"Hari's Name should always be chanted by him who must be humbler than a blade of grass (which is trodden upon); who is more patient, forbearing and charitable than a tree (which does not cry out even when it is cut down, and which does not beg for water even when scorched to death, but on the contrary, offers its treasure to whosoever seeks it, bears the sun and rain itself but protects those who take shelter under it from rain and sunshine); who, however worthy of esteem should, instead of claiming respect for himself, give respect to all (from a sense of God's immanency in all beings). He who thus takes Krishna's Name gets Krishna-prem".

Lord Gauranga became more humble in spirit and recited the following Sloka:—

"Oh Lord, I ask not for wealth or followers, or for poetic genius. May my motiveless devotion to Thee continue in me whenever I take birth."

Gauranga passed away on the 14th June, 1533.

Chetodarpana Marjanam Bhava Mahadavagni
Nirvapanam
Sreyah Kairava Chandrikaa Vitaranam
Vidhyavadhoo Jivanam;
Anandambudhi Vardhanam Pratipadam Purnamrita
Swadanam
Sarvatmasnapanam Param Vijayate Sri Krishna
Sankirtanam.

"Glorified above all is the chanting of the various names of Krishna which cleanses the mirror of Chitta, which extinguishes the great forest fire of the succession of births and rebirths, which operates like the moonbeam upon the white lily of spiritual well-being, which is the elixir of life of the bride Vidya, which makes the ocean of bliss swell, which gives the chanter the fullest enjoyment of that divine love at the utterance of each word, and which bathes the mind and the senses in divine bliss."—*Gauranga*

SAINT ARUNAGIRI

The great saint and devotee of Lord Subrahmanya, Arunagiri by name, was born at Tiruvannamalai in South India about five hundred years ago. It is said that he was born of the Veerya of Pattinathar, a great saint and Siva-bhakta. From childhood Arunagiri was brought up by his elder sister. In his early years he was a spendthrift and spent his days in extreme sensual indulgence. His paramour was one Muthi with whom he lived for years, never caring for the kind sister who was helping him financially.

Muthi, as would become a member of the dancing girls' group, was in love with Arunagiri as long as he gave her money and the other necessities she demanded. When Arunagiri could not meet the monetary demands of this lady, the relationship of love became strained. However, because of his deep and intense infatuation towards the lady, Arunagiri determined to get some money by hook or by crook. He approached his sister who was now bereft of any means even for livelihood as she had already offered everything she had for the satisfaction of her only brother's wants. However, urged by the sympathetic feeling to meet the demand of her brother at that hour of need, she parted with her only golden chain, the last of her jewels. She took it and gave it to her brother. At the same time, with the intention of removing the attachment from which Arunagiri was suffering, she asked him to do as she wanted while giving the chain to the dancing girl. Arunagiri agreed to do so. His sister said to him: "Ask her to bend down in a nude state; and give the chain to her from behind". Arunagiri handed over the jewel to Muthi in the manner desired by his sister. As Arunagiri's sister had rightly anticipated, the lifelong attachment which Arunagiri had towards ladies, and especially towards Muthi, was now cut asunder in no time by the sword of dispassion. He woke up from his long slumber of infatuated life and repented in the extreme for his past life. The degree of repentance was such as to lead him to decide upon suicide. With this object, he hurried up to the temple, climbed up the front tower, and from the top, threw himself down.

When Arunagiri was thus falling from the top of the temple tower, Lord Subrahmanya appeared before him, received him in his arms, and slowly let him down without any hurt. Now came the turning point in the life of Arunagirinathar. He got himself initiated by the Lord Himself into the mysteries of Jnana. Having been thus enlightened, he composed many songs in praise of Lord Subrahmanya.

Arunagiri spent his later life in pilgrimage to many temples in South India, composing songs in praise of the Deities enshrined in those temples. Arunagiri had a son born of Muthi, known as Muthuthandavan, who later on became a great Siva Yogi. He was patronized by one Raja Prabuda Deva Rayan in South India. In his own lifetime, Arunagiri established his literary supremacy over his contemporary scholars such as Srivilliputturar who translated the Mahabharata into Tamil.

The songs that Arunagiri composed in honour of Lord Subrahmanya during his pilgrimages, and during the period of his enlightenment, were compiled into a collection known as *Thiruppugazh* in Tamil, consisting of ten thousand verses. Of these, only about a thousand and two hundred are extant at present. The verses contain valuable instructions to aspiring souls and exhortations to realise the Supreme Being in the quickest and easiest way. They eulogise Bhakti and Sankirtan by which one can attain the highest goal of human life. *Thiruppugazh* lays stress on the path of devotion to the Lord. However, a mere repetition or *Parayana* of these songs daily will lead one to attain the grace of the Lord, and thereby Jnana. While specially stressing the Bhakti Marga, every verse of *Thiruppugazh* contains enlightening and soul-stirring glimpses of Vedanta also. Another work of Arunagiri is *Kandar Anubhuti*. This work also holds high literary merit and spiritual value. This contains many songs which are instructive and inspiring to spiritual seekers.

The Saivite Acharyas
of
Tamil Nadu

APPAR OR THIRUNAVUKKARASAR

Appar is one of the four Samaya Acharyas. He was a contemporary of Sambandhar. He was a Vellala of Thiru Amur in the district of Cuddalore in Tamil Nadu. He was born of Pugazhanar and Maathiniar. The parents gave the name "Marulneekkiar" (dispeller of darkness or ignorance) to Appar. Appar means 'father'. Sambandhar gave Marulneekkiar this name. The name Appar was first used by Sambandhar in addressing him in one of several meetings between them. Appar's soul-stirring and sublime odes earned him the title "Thirunavukkarasar" or "the Lord of Speech". Appar was a God-inspired soul. He sang devotional odes or Padigams during his pilgrimage to various shrines. He flourished in the middle of the seventh century A.D. He was a mystic and a poet.

Tilakavadhiar was the elder sister of Appar. She was betrothed to Kalippahaiyar, a military commander under the Pallava king. Kalippahaiyar had to fight against some invader from the North. He died in the battlefield. The news of the death of Kalippahaiyar reached the ears of Tilakavadhiar. She made up her mind to enter the funeral pyre. Marulneekkiar came to know of the intention of his sister. He ran to his sister, prostrated before her and said, "I am keeping my life on account of your support only after the death of our parents. If you want to give up your life, I will give up my life before you do so!". The heart of Tilakavadhiar melted. She changed her determination and resolved to lead the ascetic life and bring up her helpless younger brother.

Appar became a convert to Jainism. He studied all the Jain scriptures. He went to Pataliputra itself and became one of the spiritual heads there, as he was an erudite scholar in the Jain scriptures.

Appar's sister was very much afflicted at heart when she came to know that her brother had become a convert to Jainism. She left her native village and went to Thiruvathikai, a neighbouring town. She spent her time in meditation and prayer at the Siva's temple. She prayed to the Lord for her brother's return.

Appar fell a victim to a severe colic which could not be cured. He threw off his bowl and the garb of a Jain and went to his sister. She smeared the holy ash on the forehead of Appar and took him to the temple of Siva and asked him to prostrate before the Lord and worship Him. Appar acted accordingly. The severe colic vanished at once. Appar praised Lord Siva.

The spiritual head of the Jains at Pataliputra reported to Kadava, the Jain king, about the absconding of Appar. The district of Cuddalore was under the sway of the Pallava king Kadava. The spiritual head induced the king to persecute Appar.

Appar proceeded to the Pallava capital and appeared before the king. Appar was persecuted in various ways. He was thrown into a burning lime-kiln. He was compelled to drink poisoned milk. An elephant was sent to kill him. A heavy stone was tied to him and he was thrown into the sea. The Lord saved him. He floated alive and reached the shore at Thiruppathirippuliyur.

The Pallava king recognised the greatness of Appar and prostrated at his feet. He gave up Jainism and embraced Saivism. He built a magnificent temple of Siva called *Gunaparaveechcharam*.

Thereupon Appar proceeded on a pilgrimage to various sacred places. He visited Chidambaram, Sirgazhi and other places and sang Thevarams or odes in praise of Lord Siva.

Appar met the saint Appudi Adigal of Thingalur. Appar brought to life Appudi's son who was bitten by a cobra.

Appar then visited holy places such as Thiruvennainallur, Thiruvaamaaththur, Thirukkovalur and Thiruppennakadam and worshipped Lord Siva. He finally reached Thiruththoonganaimadam and prayed to Lord Siva: "O Siva Sankara! O Ardhanarisvara! O Source and End of all beings! I do not wish to keep the body which was in touch with the Jains. Let me have the stamp of your trident and Nandi on my body". He sang a Padigam. At once a Siva-Gana approached Appar through the grace of Lord Siva and put the stamp of trident and Nandi on the shoulder of Appar.

Then Appar proceeded to Sirgazhi to meet Sambandhar. He fell at the feet of Sambandhar. Sambandhar addressed the Vellala saint, "O my beloved Appar!".

Once Sambandhar went in a palanquin to Thiruppunthuruthi in the district of Thanjavur to meet Appar. Appar went in advance and carried the planquin. Sambandhar asked, "Where is Appar?". Appar replied, "Here am I, carrying the palanquin". Sambandhar at once got down from the palanquin, embraced Appar and shed tears of love.

Appar went to Thiruchchattimutram. He sang a Padigam and said, "O Lord, place Thy lotus feet on my head before I leave this physical body". He heard an Akasavani or voice in the sky, "Come to Thirunallur". Lord Siva placed His feet on the head of Appar. Appar prostrated on the ground. His heart was filled with indescribable delight.

Then Appar went to Thiruvambhar, Thirukadavur and Thiruveezhimizhalai. There was a great famine in Mizhalai. Appar and Sambandhar were very much grieved at heart as the devotees of Lord Siva were starving. Lord Siva appeared in the dream of both and said, "Do not be afflicted. I shall give you gold pieces". They found gold pieces daily in the temple and fed the people sumptuously.

Appar and Sambandhar visited the temple at Vedaranyam in the district of Thanjavur. Here an old temple of Lord Siva had long remained with doors shut. The Vedas themselves had once upon a time come and worshipped Siva in the temple; they did not offer their worship now, because the people had come to neglect the study of the Vedas on account of the influence of

Jainism. Sambandhar said to Appar, "Come and sing that these doors may open". Appar sang and the doors opened. Sambandhar sang. The doors shut.

On one occasion, Appar was very hungry during his pilgrimage tour. Lord Siva created a tank and a garden on the way and gave him food also.

Appar started on a journey to visit Mount Kailas. He had a tiresome journey. He had severe bruises on his feet. He heard a voice in the sky. It was the voice of Lord Siva. The voice said, "O Appar, wake up. Take a dip in the tank. You will see Me and Mount Kailas in Thiruvaiyaru". Appar took a dip in the tank and appeared in the temple of Thiruvaiyaru on the banks of the Cauvery. When he emerged out of the tank, he saw Siva and Sakti everywhere. He then entered the temple and saw Mount Kailas and Lord Siva of Mount Kailas. Appar rejoiced at the marvellous sight and sang Padigams.

Finally Appar stayed at Thiruppugalur near Thiruvarur. Here he spent the last years of his life. He was tested here by the Lord in order to show his greatness to the people. When Appar was serving in the temple, gold and diamonds appeared under his feet. Appar regarded them as stones and threw them away. On another occasion, celestial damsels appeared before him and tempted him in a variety of ways, but Appar remained undisturbed in his meditation. He merged himself in the Light of lights, Lord Siva, when he was very much advanced in age.

The teachings of Appar

By means of his poems, Appar laid the foundation of the Saiva Siddhanta school of philosophy. Appar's poems are full of imagination, spiritual insight, religious emotion and high spiritual realisation.

Appar was more learned than Sambandhar. He had a very powerful personality. He led an exemplary life as a Siva Bhakta. He put an end to the influence of Jainism. He always praises the five letters or Panchakshara. He says, "The rare jewel of the Brahmins is the Veda with its six

Angas. The rare jewel for the Saivites is the Panchakshara". Appar's exemplary life, mellifluous poetry, vast erudition and profound religious fervour attracted countless people. He had countless admirers and disciples. He had great influence. Appar's works consist of three hundred poems which form three books out of twelve in the Tamil collection of Saivite poetry known as *Thirumurai.*

Appar says: "Everything is the manifestation of Lord Siva. Siva is Narayana, Brahma, the four Vedas, the holiest, the oldest, the perfect. Though Siva is all these, He is none of these. He is without name, without birth, death or disease. He is at once the transcendent and the immanent.

"Love of Lord Siva must be felt and manifested. Pray. Worship. Weep. Dance. Lord Siva is the music or melody in the song, the sweetness in the fruit, the thought in the mind, the lustre in the eyes. He is neither male nor female. He is without dimensions.

"Subdue the senses. Practise regular meditation. Practise Sariyai, Kiriyai, Yogam and Jnanam. Develop dispassion. Transcend the three bodies. Unite the individual soul with the Supreme Soul or Lord Siva. You will attain eternal bliss and immortality. You can behold Lord Siva if you look for Him with the light of wisdom issuing forth from the wick of life, fed with the Ghee of meditation in the lamp of mind, within the house of your body.

"Plough with truth. Plant the seed of desire for knowledge. Weed out falsehood. Irrigate the mind with the water of patience. Supervise your work by looking within or introspection or self-analysis. Build the fence of Yama-Niyama or right conduct or right rules. You will soon attain Sivanandam or the eternal bliss of Siva.

"Regard your body as the temple of Lord Siva, your mind as the worshipper, Truth as purity which is necessary for worship, the jewel of the mind as the Linga, love as Ghee and milk. Perform Puja to Lord Siva thus. Lord Siva cannot be obtained without meditation on the Panchakshara and without making the mind one-pointed."

May you all follow the precepts and teachings of Appar and attain the Siva-Pada, the immortal abode of eternal bliss!

SUNDARAMURTI

There was a Brahmin by name Sadayanar in Navalur in Tamil Nadu. He was very pious and devoted to Lord Siva. He had a pious son named Nambiyarurar or Alala Sundarar. Alala Sundarar attained manhood. He was known by the name Sundaramurti Nayanar also.

Sundaramurti Nayanar is one of the four Saiva Acharyas. He was a great devotee of Lord Siva. Lord Siva of Thiruvennainallur appeared before Sundaramurti in the form of an aged Brahmin on the eve of his marriage. The Lord said that Sundarar was his bond slave and so ought to work for Him in His house. The name of the Lord was *Taduttatkonda Piran* or the Lord who obstructed and saved Sundarar from Samsara.

Sundaramurti visited several temples. He went to Adigai Virattanam. Lord Siva appeared before Sundaramurti and placed His sacred feet on his head. Sundarar then went to Thiruvarur. Lord Siva made Sundarar His friend.

Kamalini was the maid-servant of Uma Devi at Kailas. She entertained a desire to marry Alala Sundarar. So she was forced to take birth in the world at Thiruvarur. She was named as Paravai. She came of age. Lord Siva of Thiruvarur appeared in the dream of the devotees and told them, "Arrange for the marriage of Paravai and Sundaramurti". Lord Siva informed Paravai and Sundarar also. Sundarar married Paravai and both lived happily.

There was famine in Thiruvarur. Lord Siva appeared before Sundaramurti and gave him heaps of grain. It was impossible to remove this large quantity of grain. Sundaramurti asked Lord Siva to help him. The grain was removed to the house of Paravai by the Ganas, the agents of Lord Siva.

When Sundarar was at Thiruppugalur, he asked for gold for his wife. He kept his head on bricks and slept. He woke up and found the bricks converted into gold. He got gold again on his way to Viruddhachalam. He threw the gold in the river Manimuttaru according to the Lord's command. He took it again from the tank at Thiruvarur. Lord Siva showed him the way to Thirukkudalaiyur.

Lord Siva gave Sundarar food when he was going to Thirukkurukavur. On another occasion, Lord Siva begged food for Sundarar.

Sundaramurti went to Thiruvottiyur. He married Sangili, a great devotee of Lord Siva, through the grace of Lord Siva. Aninditai, Uma Devi's maid-servant who lived in Kailas, took her birth as Sangili.

Sundaramurti requested Lord Siva to stay under a certain Magizha tree when he was to swear to Sangili that he would not leave her. Sundarar wanted Sangili to go inside the temple, but Lord Siva had already informed Sangili that He was under the tree and not inside the temple. Thereupon Sangili asked Sundaramurti to come to the tree to take oath. Sundaramurti had to give consent to Sangili's request. Later on, he broke the oath that he would not leave her by going to Thiruvarur to see the Utsava leaving Sangili behind. And he became blind.

Sundaramurti said to the Lord, "If it is just that you should make me blind, kindly give me a stick". Lord Siva gave Sundaramurti a stick at Thiruvenpakkam. Sundaramurti's left eye became all right when he came to Kancheepuram. When he praised Lord Siva at Thiruvarur, his right eye also became all right.

When Sundaramurti was passing through a street in Thiruppukkoliyur, he saw that some people were crying in a house and some people were rejoicing in the opposite house. He asked the people, "What is the matter in both the houses?". They said, "Two boys aged five took bath in a tank. One boy was devoured by a crocodile and the other boy escaped. The parents of the boy who was killed by the crocodile are bitterly weeping. The parents of the boy who escaped are celebrating his thread ceremony and so they are rejoicing".

Sundarar was greatly moved. He sang a Padigam in praise of Lord Siva. The crocodile brought the child to the shore through the order of Lord Yama. The parents of the boy greatly rejoiced and prostrated before Sundarar.

During his pilgrimage, Sundarar came to the bank of the Cauvery. There was flood in the river. He wanted to have Darshan of Lord Siva at Thirivarur. He sang a Padigam. The river gave way to Sundarar. He reached Thiruvarur and worshipped the Lord.

There was a great devotee of Lord Siva in Thiruperumangalam. His name was Kalikamar. He was a Pillai by birth. He heard the news that Sundarar sent Lord Siva as a messenger to Paravai and said, "A devotee has ordered the Lord to do some work. He has made the Lord his servant. That too for the sake of a woman. Is this man who has behaved like this a devotee? I am a great sinner. My life has not yet departed from me even after I have heard such news. I have not destroyed with an iron rod my ears which heard such news of a so-called devotee".

Sundarar came to know of this condition of Kalikama Nayanar. He knew already that what he did was a great error. He prayed to the Lord to pardon him. Lord Siva wanted to unite these two devotees. He caused the disease gastritis in Kalikamar, appeared in his dream, and said, "This disease can be cured only by Sundarar". Kalikamar reflected, "It is better to bear the pains of this disease than to be cured by Sundarar". The Lord commanded Sundarar, "Go and cure the disease of Kalikamar".

Sundarar sent a message to Kalikamar about his coming to him. Kalikamar thought, "Let me give up my life before Sundarar comes to cure me". He cut open his bowels and gave up his life. The wife of Kalikamar received Sundarar with great honour.

Sundarar said to the wife of Kalikamar, "I wish to cure the disease of your husband and live with him for some time". She kept quiet and asked those who were around to tell Sundarar that her husband was not suffering from any disease and that he was sleeping. Sundarar informed the people that he had a strong desire to see Kalikamar. Then they showed Kalikamar to him. Sundarar saw the dead body of Kalikamar. He also drew the sword and wanted to kill himself. Kalikamar came back to life through the grace of Lord Siva. He at once caught hold of Sundarar. Sundarar fell at the feet of

Kalikamar. Kalikamar also prostrated at the lotus feet of Sundarar. They both embraced each other. They both went to the temple of Lord Siva and worshipped Him. Thereupon they proceeded to Thiruvarur.

Paravai was very much annoyed towards Sundarar for having left her and married Sangili. Sundarar requested Lord Siva to pacify Paravai. Lord Siva went twice to the house of Paravai, pacified her and united them both. The Lord acted the part of a messenger for His devotees. The Lord becomes a perfect slave of His sincere devotees.

Sundaramurti became quite disgusted with this worldly existence. He requested Lord Siva to take him back to Kailas. Lord Siva sent a white elephant.

Sundaramurti sang the glories of Siva in different sacred places. They are collected in book form. It is called *Thevaram*. All devotees sing *Thevaram* even today. The hymns sung by Sundaramurti, Appar or Thirunavukkarasar and Thiru Jnana Sambandhar are called *Thevaram*. The hymns sung by Manickavasagar are called *Thiruvachakam*.

Sundaramurti had the Sakhya Bhav towards Lord Siva. Therefore he was quite friendly with the Lord, took any kind of liberty with Him and asked gold, pearl garland, musk, a garland of precious stones, spectacles, clothes, fragrance, jewels, horses which can go with the swiftness of wind, golden flowers, palanquins and one third of the riches of Thiruvarur. He did not ask for these things on account of any desire for enjoyment. He had no selfish desires. He did not keep the things. He utilised them for those who depended on him.

Sundaramurti showed to the world the path of Sakhya Marga or Sakhya Bhav in Bhakti.

THIRU JNANA SAMBANDHAR

Sambandhar took his birth in a Brahmin family in Sirgazhi in the district of Thanjavur. Sirgazhi is also known by the name Brahmapuri. Thiru Jnana Sambandhar was born of Bhagavati and Sivapadahridayar.

Bhagavati and Sivapadahridayar went to the tank to take their bath. The child also accompanied his parents. The parents left the child on the bank and took their bath. The child cried aloud, "O Mother! O Father!", as he did not see his parents. The parents did not hear the cry of the child, but Lord Siva and Parvati heard the cry. They both appeared before the child. Parvati gave the child milk. Along with that milk, the child drank the milk of divine knowledge. From that moment he began to sing the praises of Lord Siva. He sang soul-stirring, sublime Thevarams or odes. This incident occurred when Thiru Jnana Sambandhar was three years old.

The parents finished their bath and came near the child. Milk was flowing from the child's mouth and there were tears in his eyes. The parents asked, "My beloved child, who gave you milk?". The child sang a hymn and narrated everything to his parents. The parents rejoiced heartily and gave to the child the name Thiru Jnana Sambandhar, as he had attained divine wisdom through the grace of Lord Siva and Parvati. Sambandhar was also known by the name Pillayar.

Thereupon, Sambandhar proceeded to Thirukkolakka. He sang a hymn or ode in the temple. Lord Siva presented him with a gold cymbal.

There was a devotee of Lord Siva in Thiruverukkattampuliyur. He could play well on the musical instrument Yazh. His name was Thiruneelakanda Yazhpanar. He went to Sirgazhi to pay his respects to Sambandhar. Sambandhar took him to the temple of Lord Siva and heard his music. Yazhpanar prayed to Sambandhar and said, "Let me always live with you playing thy hymns on Yazh. Grant me my prayer". Sambandhar agreed. Thereupon Sambandhar and his parents and Yazhpanar proceeded to Chidambaram and worshipped Nataraja. One day Sambandhar saw the three thousand Brahmins of Chidambaram as the three thousand Siva-Ganas.

Sambandhar wanted to worship the Lord at Aratturai. He walked by foot. He got tired and so he rested on the way in Maranpadi during the night. As he was a small boy, his tender feet were very much affected by the long walk. The Lord of Aratturai appeared in the dream of the priests and told them, "Sambandhar is coming to me. Take the pearl umbrella and the pearl palanquin which are now in the temple and hand them over to him". The priests woke up and went to the temple. There they saw the articles which they had beheld in their dream. They took those articles, went to Maranpadi and gave them to Sambandhar. They informed Sambandhar about the command of the Lord. Sambandhar knew this already, as the Lord had informed him also about this in his dream.

Thereupon the thread ceremony of Sambandhar was performed by the priests. Sambandhar did not study the Vedas and the Vedangas, but he repeated them and explained them to the priests. The priests were struck with wonder.

Appar heard all about the glory of Sambandhar. He came from Chidambaram to Sirgazhi to pay his respects to Sambandhar. Sambandhar came forward to receive Appar. They both spoke words of affection and love. Appar remained in the house of Sambandhar for some days.

The daughter of the king of the Mazhava country was suffering from an incurable disease. The king tried all sorts of medicines. Finally he took his daughter to the temple at Thirupachchil Achchiraamam and left her there before the Lord. Sambandhar visited the temple and saw the princess in an unconscious state. His heart melted. He sang a Padigam and worshipped Lord Siva. The last line in each stanza ends, "Is it right for the Lord to cause suffering to this girl?". At once the princess became all right. She got up and prostrated at the lotus feet of Sambandhar.

Then Sambandhar proceeded to Thiruppattiswaram temple. It was a very hot day. Lord Siva of Thiruppattiswaram temple sent a pearl palanquin to Sambandhar through the Siva-Ganas to ward off the heat of the sun.

Sambandhar sang a Padigam and received one thousand gold coins from the Lord of Acaduttturai. In the Padigam he asks in every stanza, "Is this the way You look after my interests? If You do not give me anything, is that Your grace?". Sambandhar gave the gold coins to his father.

Sambandhar proceeded to Thirumarugal. There a traveller was bitten by a snake. His wife was bemoaning the death of her husband. Sambandhar sang a Padigam. The traveller was brought back to life.

There was severe famine at Thiruvizhimalai. Sambandhar received one measure of gold every day from the Lord at Thiruvizhimalai. He purchased provisions for this money and fed all the Siva Bhaktas.

Kulachchirai, minister of the Pandyan king, invited Sambandhar to his place. He was a devotee of Lord Siva. Mangayarkarasi, the queen, was also a devotee of Lord Siva. Sambandhar visited Madurai and worshipped the Lord there.

The Jains set fire to the camp of Sambandhar. Sambandhar sang a Padigam. The fire was extinguished, but the Pandyan king got severe fever. The doctors and the Jains were not able to cure him. The king requested Sambandhar to cure him. Sambandhar sang a Padigam in praise of the holy ash and applied the ash to the king's body. At once the king became all right.

Thereupon it was decided that both Sambandhar and the Jains were to put their writings into fire and that if Sambandhar's religion was the better one, the palm leaves which he put into fire should not be burnt. Sambandhar came out successful in the fire test.

Afterwards there was another test. The Jains said that the palm leaf which contained the writings of the true religion should go against the current of the Vaigai river. The minister said, "What is the punishment for those who get defeated in the test?". The Jains replied, "Those who get defeated will be hanged". The Jains put a palm leaf in the river. It went along the current of the river. Sambandhar wrote one of his poems and threw it into the Vaigai. It went against the current and reached the place known as Thiruvedagam. Sambandhar sang a Padigam to stop the palm leaf. It stopped. The minister ran, took the leaf and showed it to the king.

Then some of the Jains were hanged. The rest embraced Saivism. Sambandhar went with the king and the queen to the temple at Madurai and praised the Lord there.

Sambandhar wanted to go to Thirukkollampudur to have Darshan of the Lord there, but there was flood in the river. The boatman gave up the idea of crossing it. He tied the boat somewhere and left the bank. Sambandhar took the boat, sang a Padigam and went over to the other side along with his party.

The devotees of Sambandhar were blowing the trumpet of victory when they were travelling. The Buddhists became very jealous of this. They informed their spiritual head Buddhanandi. Buddhanandi called Sambandhar for a discussion.

Sambandha Saranalayar, a disciple of Sambandhar who was recording all the songs of his master, sang a Padigam sung by Sambandhar and said, “A thunder will fall on the head of this Buddhanandi”. At once a thunder fell on the head of Buddhanandi. He died immediately. Some Buddhists ran away. Some others embraced Saivism and wore the holy ash on their foreheads.

Thereupon Sambandhar visited Thiruvottur. One man came to Sambandhar and said, “O Swami! All the palmyrah seeds have become male palmyrahs. People are mocking at me. Kindly bless me”. Sambandhar sang a Padigam. The male palmyrahs were converted into female palmyrahs.

In Mylapore there lived a devotee of Siva named Sivanesa Chettiar. A daughter was born to him after doing penance. Sivanesar gave her the name Poompavai. He heard about the glory of Sambandhar and surrendered all his wealth and also his daughter to the saint. One day Poompavai was bitten by a cobra while she was gathering flowers in the garden. She died immediately. Sivanesar cremated her, kept the bones in a pot and kept the pot in the Kannikaimadam. He decorated the pot with silk cloth. Sivanesar invited Sambandhar to the place. Sambandhar came to Mylapore and had

Darshan of Kapaleeswarar. The devotees informed Sambandhar about the death of Sivanesar's daughter. Sambandhar asked Sivanesar to bring the pot which contained the bones of his daughter. Sivanesar brought the pot at once. Sambandhar sang a Padigam. Poompavai came out of the pot just as Lakshmi emerged from the lotus. Sivanesar's heart was filled with intense delight. There was a rain of flowers from the celestial regions. Then Sambandhar went to Siragazhi.

The Brahmins approached Sambandhar and said, "O Swami! You will have to marry a girl now in order to perform the sacrifices mentioned in the Vedas". Sambandhar agreed. The Brahmins and the father of Sambandhar selected the daughter of Nambandar Nambi as the bride. The marriage ceremony was arranged at Nallur Perumanam. Sambandhar went along with his chosen bride into the temple. When he approached the Lord, he and his bride and his followers got merged in the Jyoti or the effulgence of the Lord.

Sambandhar says in one of his Padigams, "O foolish man, do not allow days to pass. Serve Lord Siva who has a blue neck. Hear His praise. Meditate on His form. Repeat always the Panchakshara. Live in the company of the devotees of Siva. Serve them. His Name will remove all the evil and dangers likely to fall on you and your children. Worship Lord Siva. He will confer on you eternal bliss and immortality!".

MANICKAVASAGAR

Manickavasagar was a Brahmin by birth. He took his birth in Tiruvadavur, seven miles from Madurai on the banks of the Vaigai river. He must have lived between 650 A.D. and 692 A.D. Some say that he flourished in the tenth or the eleventh century. He secured the friendship of the King of Madurai, Arimardana Pandyan, and became his Chief Minister. He was also known by the name Vadavurar.

The Pandyan king sent Manickavasagar with a lot of wealth to purchase horses for the State. Manickavasagar started on his journey. On his way he heard the Kirtan of Siva in a garden in Thiruperundurai. Lord Siva assumed the form of a Siva Yogi and seated himself underneath a tree with His Siva-Ganas as disciples. He came there to initiate Manickavasagar in Siva-Jnana.

Manickavasagar fell at the feet of the Lord and surrendered himself. Lord Siva initiated Manickavasagar into the mysteries of Siva-Jnana. Manickavasagar spent away all the money he had brought in the construction of temples and in feeding devotees of Siva. He renounced everything, wore a Kaupin and became a Sannyasin. The matter was reported to the king.

The Raja sent a letter to Manickavasagar and ordered him to see him at once. Manickavasagar did not pay any attention. Lord Siva said to Manickavasagar, "I will bring the horses on *Avani Moolam*. You go in advance. Give this diamond to the Raja". Manickavasagar proceeded to Madurai, gave the diamond to the Raja and said, "The horses will come here on *Avani Moolam*". The Raja became impatient. He did not get any information about the horses even two days before *Avani Moolam*. He thought that Manickavasagar had cheated him. Therefore he put Manickavasagar in jail and tormented him severely.

The horses came on the morning of *Avani Moolam*. Lord

Siva assumed the form of a groom. How merciful is the Lord towards His devotees! The Raja was highly pleased. He released Manickavasagar from jail and made apology to him. Through the Lila of the Lord, jackals had come in the form of horses. All the horses later turned into jackals. The Raja became terribly angry. He again tortured Manickavasagar. He made him stand on the hot sand-bed of the Vaigai river at twelve noon. At once the Lord caused flood in the river to cool His devotee's feet. The whole town was inundated.

The ministers told the Raja that this calamity had happened on account of his ill-treatment of the great Mahatma. The Raja at once released Manickavasagar. He prostrated before him and requested him to stop the flood. As soon as Manickavasagar marched on the bank, the flood subsided. The Pandyan king ordered all the subjects to put one basketful of mud on the bank of the river. All the breaches were made all right except the portion of the breach given to an old woman, Vandi. She was in distress. Lord Siva Himself, out of compassion, appeared as a coolie before that old woman Vandi and offered his services to her in return for a handful of rice-flour. He was simply playing. He kept the mud in his hands. The Raja came to know that the coolie of Vandi did not do any work. He became very angry and beat the coolie with a stick. The blow was felt by the Raja and everyone in the town. The coolie vanished. The Raja came to know that this was the Lila of Lord Siva. He recognized the glory of Manickavasagar also.

Thereupon Manickavasagar met Lord Siva. The Lord ordered him to visit all the places of pilgrimage and then go to Chidambaram. Manickavasagar visited Tiruvannamalai, Kancheepuram and other places, sang his *Thiruvachakam*, and lastly went to Chidambaram. *Thirukoovali* was written by him in Chidambaram.

Then Manickavasagar entered into discussion with a Buddhist teacher and defeated him. Sarasvati made the Buddhist teacher and his disciples dumb. Then the Buddhist king approached Manickavasagar and said, "You made my teacher and all his disciples dumb. If you can make my dumb daughter speak, I and my subjects will embrace Saivism".

Manickavasagar then put some questions to the dumb daughter of the king. She began to speak. Then the Buddhist king and all his subjects became Saivites. Manickavasagar then made the Buddhist teacher and his disciples speak once again.

Then Lord Siva approached Manickavasagar in the form of a Brahmin. Manickavasagar repeated the whole *Thiruvachakam* to the Brahmin. The Brahmin wrote down everything on palmyrah leaves and wrote in the end, "Manickavasagar repeated this, Thiruchittambala Udayar wrote this". Then the Brahmin kept everything on the Panchakshara Step of the Chitsabai. The Brahmins of Chidambaram showed this to Manickavasagar and requested him to tell the meaning of the verses. Manickavasagar said, "This Thillai Nataraja is the purport of these stanzas". He at once merged himself in the feet of Nataraja at the age of thirty-two.

The poems of Manickavasagar are fifty-two in number. They are all collected together under the title *Thiruvachakam*. They are most beautiful, sublime and inspiring. They contain ornamental poetry. South Indians sing *Thiruvachakam* daily. The hearts of those who hear these hymns melt at once.

Dear readers! You can understand from the life of Manickavasagar that Lord Siva becomes the slave of His devotees.

The Alwars
or
Vaishnava Mystics
of
South India

INTRODUCTION

Whenever there is a decay of righteousness, whenever people become irreligious and unrighteous, great saints take their birth for the spiritual uplift of the people. The Alwars incarnated in South India to save the people from such a crisis.

Alwars are the Vaishnava mystics or saints of South India. They are a treasure special to South India. Their lives stand out for their crystal purity and profound faith in God, Lord Narayana.

The Alwars rekindled the flame of Bhakti in South India. With them began a resurrection of the Bhakti cult of the Bhagavata School. The advent of the Alwars gave a new glow, a new splendour, a new liveliness, a new energy and a new life to the Bhakti movement. The Alwars ever lived in God. Their life was a ceaseless stream of meditation and divine communion. They ever sang the glory of Lord Hari. The names of Narayana, Rama, Krishna, Achyuta, Govinda and Madhava were ever on their lips. They felt the presence of the Lord everywhere. They were God-intoxicated saints. Their state cannot be described in words. Their glory is ineffable. Their minds were ever fixed at the lotus feet of the Lord. Their heart was the *sanctum sanctorum* of Lord Hari. The Lord ever played, conversed and lived with them. The Alwars were the embodiment of love, kindness and compassion. They transformed all persons who came in contact with them.

The Alwars came from all castes. Four of them were orthodox Brahmins. Two of them were non-Brahmins. One belonged to the depressed class. One was a woman. Four were '*Ayonijas*', i.e., not born of womb. One was a Kshatriya. Nothing can be known about the first three Alwars—Poygai Alwar, Bhudattalwar and Peyalwar except their place of birth.

The Vaishnava saints are twelve in number. They are known as Alwars, because of the fact that they were ever immersed in God-love. The Vaishnava scriptures declare that

Lord Hari sent down in the form of the twelve Alwars His Srivatsa, Kaustubha, Vaijayanti, Vanamala, Sridevi, Bhudevi, Nila Devi, Ananta, Garuda, Sudarshan, Panchajanya and Saranga to disseminate Bhakti and deliver the people from the clutches of ignorance.

Vaishnavism is a very important and vital cult in Hinduism. It has had a most valuable history. It still claims a most influential following in India. It spread and grew in influence in South India many generations earlier than Saivism. The earlier among the Alwars flourished long before the Pallava and the Chola Kings came into prominence and power.

Poygai Alwar, Bhudattalwar, Periyalwar and Tirumazhisai Alwar were born at the end of the Dvapara Yuga. The other eight Alwars were born in this Kali Era. They are said to have lived between the fourth and the eighth centuries A.D.

The poems or hymns of the Alwar saints are familiarly known as *"Nalayira Divya Prabhandam"*, a book of four thousand verses. These hymns were collected by the great scholar Nada Muni. They were the outpourings from the hearts of the Alwar saints. *The Divya Prabhandam* is a sacred treasure of divine knowledge. It contains the quintessence of the Vedas, the Ithihasas and the Puranas in a very attractive form. A burning fervour of devotion breathes in every verse.

The Divya Prabhandam hymns have got various commentaries called *Arayirappadi* (6,000 expositions of Tirukurugai Piran Pillai), *Onpathinayirappadi* (9,000 expositions of Manjeer), *Panneerayirappadi* (12,000 expositions of Alagiamanavala Jeer), *Irupathinalayirappadi* (24,000 expositions of Periavachava Pillai) and *Muppathiarayirappadi* (36,000 expositions by Nampillai, the disciple of Nam Jeer).

The Vaishnava hymns were sung in old tunes named Kolli, Kurunji, Takkesi, etc., which are not now current. They are now sung in modern Carnatic tunes.

The *Divya Prabhandam* called *Thiruvoymozhi*, the inspired words from the holy lips of the Alwars, is sung in chorus by the Vaishnavas at home and in the temples.

THE THREE ANCIENT ALWARS

Poygai Alwar (Saroyogi), Bhudattalwar and Peyalwar are the three most ancient Alwars. They were born-saints. They are called the 'Pioneers of the Alwars'. Poygai Alwar was born at Kancheepuram in the 862,962nd year of the Dvapara Yuga, i.e., nearly 5,500 years ago. Bhudattalwar was born the next day in Tirukadarmallai, the present-day Mahabalipuram. Peyalwar was born the next day at Mamayilai, now called Mylapore.

Poygai Alwar is regarded as the incarnation of Panchajanya or the conch of Lord Hari. Bhudattalwar is regarded as the incarnation of His Gadha or mace. Peyalwar is regarded as the incarnation of Nandaka, the sword of Lord Hari.

We know nothing of the early life and Sadhana of these three Alwars. They came into limelight when they met one another unexpectedly at Thirukkoyilur, which is situated on the banks of the river Southern Pennar in South Arcot district. Poygai Alwar worshipped the Lord in the temple. It was a dark and tempestuous night. There was rain. He took shelter in the narrow *Pial* of the house of a devotee. He was meditating. A few minutes later, Bhudattalwar came there and said, "Who lives here? Is there a place for me to rest?". Poygai Alwar said, "Yes, there is. One can lie down and two can sit". Bhudattalwar replied, "All right, let us sit down". He was admitted. The two were sitting and talking of God. Now Peyalwar came and said, "Is there any place for me to rest?". Poygai Alwar said, "One can lie down, two can sit and three can stand here". Peyalwar said, "All right, let us stand". He was also admitted. The three were standing on the *Pial* and meditating on Lord Hari. They felt a great pressure as if somebody else was amidst them. The intruder was none else than Lord Hari. God Trivikrama of Thirukkoyilur went there and pressed against them. By their meditation and by His grace the Alwars learnt who the newcomer was. They saw Lord Vishnu.

The three Alwars became ecstatic. Their joy knew no bounds. They surrendered at the lotus feet of the Lord and prayed for the joy of singing His glory. Their prayer was granted. Then and there each Alwar consecrated a hundred elegant and melodious verses to the glory of Lord Hari.

Poygai Alwar laid great stress on Jnana. Bhudattalwar laid great stress on Bhakti and Peyalwar on renunciation. They realised and uttered the same essential truths. They never felt or uttered any depreciation of Lord Siva. They realised and sang the essential unity of Lord Siva and Lord Vishnu. They were far superior to the bigoted commentators of later days.

The verses of these three ancient Alwars are collectively known as *Antadis*. In an *Antadi*, the last word of each verse forms the first word of the succeeding one.

The ancient Alwars showed perfect tolerance towards Saivism. Poygai Alwar says that there is but one God who is variously called Siva and Hari. that His vehicle is either Garuda or a Bull, and that His action is either destruction or preservation. He says also that the Supreme Lord is one and the same, though He appears in two forms as Hara and Narayana.

Peyalwar also states that he saw the Lord at Venkata Hill as Siva with His matted locks and axe, and as Hari with His discus and crown.

The message of these ancient Alwars is: "Control the senses. Remain in the holy company of devotees. Do total surrender to Lord Narayana. Repeat His Name always. Worship Him. Meditate on Him. Sing His glory. He is the Lord of the three worlds. He is your prop and refuge. Obtain His grace. You will attain bliss and immortality. His grace alone can save you. He abides in your heart".

PERIYALWAR

Periyalwar means 'Great Alwar'. Periyalwar was known by the name Vishnuchitta also as his mind was ever absorbed in Lord Vishnu. He was the foster-father of Andal.

All the Alwars or Vaishnavite mystics of South India form the body and limbs of Nammalwar. Periyalwar forms the head. The other Alwars prayed to the Lord for wisdom and liberation, but Periyalwar, out of Vatsalya Bhav towards the Lord, cared much for His well-being and blessed Him: "His holy feet may remain in undiminished effulgence for millions and millions of years to come—*Pallandu*". Hence, a prominent position is given to Periyalwar.

A pious Brahmin named Mukundachary lived with his chaste and devoted wife Padma in Srivilliputhur in the Tirunelveli district. He was daily praying to the Lord for the gift of a child. His prayer was granted. Periyalwar or Vishnuchitta was born. He is regarded as the incarnation of Garuda, the vehicle of Lord Hari.

Periyalwar lived in the local temple and ever meditated on Lord Hari. He had a beautiful garden. He gathered the flowers daily and made garlands for Vatapatrasayin, the Lord of the temple. He expounded the Bhagavata to a large number of people. He was a great Sanskrit scholar.

The Pandya country (Tirunelveli and Madurai districts of Tamil Nadu) was then ruled by the Pandyan King Sri Vallaba Deva. He had his court at Madurai. He met a learned Brahmin pilgrim who was going from Kashi to Rameswaram.

The king said, "You are a learned Brahmin. Tell me a truth from your experience".

The Brahmin said, "Listen to me with rapt attention. The necessary provision for the rainy season should be made during the other eight months of the year. The things required for the night should be got ready during the day. Old age should be provided for while young. Even so must one earn in this life the virtues which would bestow on him eternal bliss and immortality".

The king called his chief priest, Chelva Nambi, and said, "I have a strong aspiration for attaining God-realisation. How can I attain this?".

The priest said, "A religious conference or a Parliament of Religions must be held. All the saints and the great Yogis will assemble. Ample reward must be given to the worthy person. You can hear their valuable teachings. You can live in their company and follow their instructions".

The king agreed to the proposals of the priest. Due publicity for holding the conference was arranged throughout the country. A big money-purse for the victor in the discussions was also intended to be awarded.

The Parliament of Religions was held in Madurai. Professors of every faith in the country attended the conference. Vaishnavites, Saivites, Saktas, Jains, Buddhists and Pasupadas were all present on this unique occasion. Heated discussions went on. No one satisfied the king.

Lord Hari appeared in the dream of Vishnuchitta or Periyalwar and said, "Awake Vishnuchitta, start at once for Madurai. A big religious conference is being held there under the patronage of the king. Take part in the conference. I assure you of full success. Give to the king and the people the message of devotion to Lord Hari".

Vishnuchitta attended the conference and took a prominent part in it. The king welcomed him and paid him due respects. Vishnuchitta answered all the questions put to him by the scholars. He said, "Lord Hari is the Supreme Deity. He is the highest Truth. He is the Protector. Take refuge in Him alone. Do total, unreserved, ungrudging self-surrender. Repeat His Mantra *Om Namo Narayanaya.* Obtain His grace. He will liberate you. He will make you immortal. He will give you supreme peace and eternal bliss. Through His grace only you can conquer Maya. He abides in the heart of all beings. He is all-pervading. He is all-merciful. He is infinite. Sing His glory. Do Japa of His Name. Worship Him. Be ever attached to His lotus feet".

A miracle happened now. The money bag which was fixed in a high place broke loose and fell at the feet of Vishnuchitta by itself. The king was quite convinced. He was highly satisfied.

The king prostrated at the feet of Periyalwar and accepted him as his Guru or spiritual preceptor. The Alwar was taken in procession on an elephant along the streets of Madurai. Suddenly the Alwar saw a vision in the sky. Lord Hari appeared on His vehicle Garuda along with His consort Lakshmi to witness the procession.

Periyalwar took the two bells that were hanging on both sides of the elephant, used them as cymbals and began to sing. He had the Vatsalya Bhav at that moment. He treated the Lord as his child. The poem he composed then is known as '*Pallandu*' which means 'many years'. This is a thrilling hymn. Vaishnavas sing this hymn in their homes and temples.

The meaning of this hymn is: "Many years, very many years, many billions of years unto Thee, O Lord. May Thy lotus feet protect us. Many years to Thy consort Sri Lakshmi. Many years to the effulgent discus which is held in Thy right hand. Many years to that conch that blows Thy glory in the battlefield. O devotees! Sing the song of *Om Namo Narayanaya* and come and worship His lotus feet. Repeat His thousand names. Loudly declare, 'Many thousands of years to our Lord!'. All our family members and forefathers and descendants are His servants. He will purify us. He will protect us.

"O Lord who danced upon the five-headed snake! Many years unto Thee! I am Thy humble servant. I wear the yellow clothes worn by Thee. I eat the remnant of Thy plate, Thy Prasad. I wear on my head the Tulasi garland already worn by Thee. Thy will be done. I live to fulfil Thy mission. I live to disseminate Thy glory and the glory of Thy Name. I am Thy devotee. I am Thy servant. I ever repeat Thy Mantra *Om Namo Narayanaya*. Many years unto Thee, my Lord!!".

Periyalwar has given us two poems. The first is the *Pallandu* in twelve verses. The other is a collection known as *Periyalwar Thirumozhi* in four hundred and sixty-one charming verses of fine melody. *Pallandu* is given the foremost place in the collection of works of all the Alwars. What Pranava is to the Vedas, so is Pallandu to the works of the Alwars.

Periyalwar Thirumozhi treats of the Lilas of Lord Krishna. It contains the essence of the Bhagavatam.

Periyalwar declares: "People who do not remember the Lord Hari should not have been born. If they are already born, they bring discredit to their parents. Those who do not repeat the Name of the Lord eat and drink sin. They live in vain".

Periyalwar had Vatsalya Bhav. He fondled Lord Krishna as his son. He said, "My child, do not cry. Sleep peacefully in the golden cradle of my heart. Eat this butter and sweetmeat. Darling, why are you mischievous? Do not trouble the Gopis and your mother. Become a good, quiet child. The Gopis complain very much about you. You drank their milk when they came out of their houses. You took the butter stealthily. Do not go to the forest tomorrow. Be here with me. Your feet will ache very much. They are very tender.

"My darling plays the flute now. How melodious it is! It is thrilling and soul-stirring. It is sweeter than nectar. All the cows and the other animals stand like images when they hear His flute".

Periyalwar passed away at Alagarkoil, near Madras, at the age of 85.

Glory to Periyalwar who is the crest-jewel of all the Alwars! May his blessings be upon us all.

NAMMALWAR

Nammalwar is the first great mystic and poet. He is the greatest among the Alwars. 'Nammalwar' means 'Our Alwar'. He is also known by the names Satakopar and Vakulabharanar. Nammalwar is the popular name.

Tradition says that Nammalwar was born in Thirukkuruhur, now called as "Azhwar Thirunagari", in the Tirunelveli district, on the banks of the Tambraparani, on a Friday, which was a Full Moon day in Vygasi, Pramadhi, in the 43rd year after the birth of the Kali Age.

Nammalwar was born of Kariar or Karimaran and Udaiya Nangaiyar. Kariar was a Vellala Pillai. His ancestors were all devoted worshippers of Lord Hari. Kariar was married, while young, to Udaiya Nangaiyar, daughter of the Vaishnava Sthanik of the village of Thiruvanparisaran, lying on the other side of the Western Ghats. Udaiya Nangaiyar was a chaste woman. Nammalwar was known by the names of Maran and Senamsa.

Kariar and Udaiya Nangaiyar had no children for a long time. They did rigorous Tapas for getting a child. Once when they were returning from a visit to Thiruvanparisaran, they halted on the way at a Vaishnava temple in the village of Thirukkurungudi and prayed to the Deity for a boy. Their prayer was heard. Their prayer was granted. A divine child was born to them. The child was Maran or Nammalwar.

The child was a strange one. He did not open his eyes. He did not cry or suck his mother's milk. Lord Hari and Lakshmi came down from their heavenly abode Vaikuntha to Thirukkuruhur itself and blessed Maran.

The parents took the child on the twelfth day after its birth to the local Vaishnavite temple on the bank of the river. They hung a cradle in a tamarind tree nearby. The child lived there for sixteen years without food or water. The Lord sent his messengers to instruct the child in the highest spiritual truths. The child sat if he was seated. He stood if made to stand on the legs. He lay down quietly if he was laid down.

Another version of the story has it that the parents left the child at the feet of the Lord Hari in the local temple. The child walked straight to a tamarind tree, entered a big hole in its trunk, sat in Padmasana, closed his eyes and entered into Samadhi.

Madhurakavi was a Brahmin of Thirukkoyilur in the Chola country. He learnt all the Vedas and the sciences in his boyhood. He went on a pilgrimage to the sacred places of Northern India such as Ayodhya and the rest. He saw one night a strange, brilliant light in the South. He was struck with great astonishment. The light was as bright as the rising sun. The same light appeared the next night also. He saw it for three nights consecutively. Madhurakavi was not able to know what it meant. He imagined that some great thing had happened in the South. He followed the light and travelled to the South. At last he came to Thirukkuruhur on the banks of the Tambraparani. The strange light vanished.

Thereupon Madhurakavi went to the town and asked the people if anything strange had happened in the place. They informed him of the strange child that had been born several years earlier and that now lay in a cradle in the shade of a tamarind tree on the bank of the Tambraparani river. Madhurakavi went to the spot on the riverside and saw the silent Maran. He was struck with great astonishment. He wanted to find out whether Maran had consciousness or not. He lifted a big stone and threw it in front of Maran. Maran who had remained with closed eyes for sixteen years now opened them and saw.

Madhurakavi asked Maran an abstruse philosophical question: "If within a dead thing a small thing were to take birth, what will the latter eat and where will it sleep?". The meaning is: "If within the inanimate matter or body, the subtle soul or Jiva were to take birth, what would it feed on and where would it rest?". Maran replied, "The small thing will feed on it and rest therein". The meaning is: "The subtle soul encased in matter or Prakriti will feed on it. The Prakriti will enjoy pleasure and pain in the body and rest in it. Or it will enjoy God and rest in God".

Madhurakavi was struck with admiration at the subtle and wise answer. He became Maran's disciple. He determined to remain by the side of his Guru and learn wisdom at his feet. Maran sang soul-stirring hymns such as *Thiruvirutham, Thiruvasiriam, Peria Thiruvantadi* and *Thiruvaimozhi*. Madhurakavi carefully wrote down the songs—as they were sung—on palm leaves and published them after the death of Nammalwar.

The popular view is that *Thiruvirutham* contains the essence of the Rig Veda, that *Thiruvasiriam* contains the essence of the Yajur Veda, that *Peria Thiruvantadi* contains the Atharva Veda and that *Thiruvaimozhi* contains the essence of the Sama Veda. This is not correct. There is no semblance between Nammalwar's works and the Vedas. The only thing that is common to both Nammalwar's works and the Vedas is that both contain descriptions about God and the means of attaining God-realisation.

Nammalwar was perhaps unmarried. The chronicles say nothing on this subject.

Nammalwar was a great poet. His life was a continuous stream of meditation and revelation. The poems speak of his wealth of mystical emotion and lofty spiritual vision. He sang his songs extempore.

Nammalwar passed away when he was thirty-five years old. An image of Nammalwar is still worshipped in the present temple of Azhwar Thirunagari. Nammalwar's songs are recited in this temple and in other Vaishnavite temples such as Srirangam. Thirumangai Alwar established the custom of reciting Thiruvaimozhi in the temple at Srirangam in South India.

Nammalwar ever lived in divine consciousness. He had cosmic consciousness. He experienced "*Sarvam Vishnumayam Jagat*. The whole world is full of Vishnu". He would embrace a tree or a calf or a pillar and say: "This is my Lord Hari". He would point out to the blue sky and say: "Here is my blue-coloured Krishna". He shed profuse tears. He sang, wept and danced.

Playing in the dust, Nammalwar would say, "This is

Vamana's earth". He would embrace fire and cry, 'Achyuta!'. He would embrace the cool wind and say, 'My Govinda!'. He would see the mountain and say, "O Great Narayana, come". When the rains poured, he would say, "Vishnu is come", and dance. He would run after a serpent and would say, "This is Vishnu's bed". When he heard the music of the flute, he would think it was Krishna's. When he saw shepherdesses with butter, he would say, "This is the butter that Krishna ate". When he saw cows, he would run after them saying, "Here is Lord Krishna".

Nammalwar sings: "I have not collected flowers and adored Thee with devotion. I have not subjugated my senses. I have not adored Thee with food and water. I am much afflicted. Give me Thy Darshan. My eyes are brimming over with tears. How long shall I remain separate from Thee? O Effulgence! O my Parent! O Nectar! O Knowledge's End! Let me cling to Thy lotus feet. Come to me now. Shower Thy grace on me. Let me be freed from births and deaths".

KULASEKHARA ALWAR

Kulasekhara was a pious king of the Kerala or Chera dynasty of South India. He was a king at Calicut and was the son of King Dritavratha. He was born at Tiruvanjikkulam in the 28th year of the Kali Era, in Prabhava, Masi, Sukla Paksha, Dvadasi, Thursday, when the star Punarvasu was in ascendancy.

Kulasekhara was an ardent devotee of Sri Rama. He found happiness in worshipping Lord Rama and in the service of His devotees. He was learned, wise and devoted. He had knowledge of Sanskrit and Tamil. He was proficient in the Vedas. He was chivalrous. He attained victories over the then princes of South India. He had titles such as *Koodanayaka* and *Kongarkone.*

Kulasekhara ruled his dominion justly and wisely. He was an illustrious king. There was peace and prosperity everywhere. All people led a life of contentment and peace. Though Kulasekhara ruled the kingdom, his mind was always in God. He developed Vairagya. Worldly pleasures did not give him satisfaction. He wanted to go on a pilgrimage to Srirangam and end his days there amidst devotees in divine service and meditation. He made preparation several times, but his journey was postponed for one reason or the other.

Kulasekhara Alwar had Dasya Bhav, the attitude of servant towards the Lord. He was highly devoted to the Bhaktas. To him, smearing of the body with the dust of the feet of the devotees of God was more efficacious than a bath in the sacred Bhagirathi.

Ministers' mischief

The ministers attempted to turn the religious bent of mind of Kulasekhara. A costly pearl necklace belonging to the king was lost. The ministers contrived to prejudice the mind of the king against the devotees. They laid the blame on the Sri Vaishnava devotees who had always free access to the palace at all times. They said to the king that the devotees were imposters only.

The king said, "I shall prove that real Bhaktas are innocent. They will not stoop to theft!". He ordered the servants to bring a cobra shut up in a pot. He said, "Let that person who charges the devotees with theft put his hand into this pot. If the allegation is true, the cobra will not bite". No one ventured to come forward. Kulasekhara boldly put his hands into the pot to prove the innocence of the devotees. The cobra shrank from biting the king. The king got through the ordeal successfully. The ministers put their heads down in shame. The pearl necklace was got back from the real thief.

Kulasekhara's devotion to Rama

Kulasekhara took immense delight in hearing the exposition of the Ramayana by the court Pundit. One day the Pundit was reciting and explaining that portion of the story where Rama was said to be fighting singly in the Dandaka forest with 14,000 Rakshasas under the command of Khara and Dushana. Kulasekhara was very much agitated. His devotion to Rama was at once aroused. He thought that his Rama was in danger and that he should at once go to his help. He ordered his forces to be got ready to go to Sri Rama's aid. The Pundit quickly read, "Rama, single-handed, killed all the fourteen thousand Asuras and returned safe to his Ashram". Then only did the king's agitation subside. He disbanded his army as Rama had won the battle. So intense and profound was Kulasekhara's devotion to Sri Rama.

On another occasion, the court Pundit was reciting the incident of Sita's abduction by Ravana. Kulasekhara became very indignant. He prepared himself at once to proceed to Lanka to fight with Ravana and kill him and rescue Sita. He immediately went to the seashore, plunged into the ocean and resolved to swim to Lanka. Sri Rama Himself appeared before Kulasekhara and informed him of His victory in Lanka. He caught hold of Kulasekhara, brought him safe to the seashore and accompanied him to his capital and then disappeared.

His pilgrimage

Kulasekhara eventually crowned as king his son Dritavratha and went to Srirangam, Tirupathi, Ayodhya, Chitrakut, Brindavan, Thirukannapuram and other places of pilgrimage.

Kulasekhara stayed at Tirupathi. He sang soul-stirring songs there: "I do not wish to possess dominions. I do not wish rulership. I have no attraction for the sensual objects of the world or the celestial enjoyments. Nothing in this world can tempt me. O Lord! Venkateswara! Let me live in the sacred hill. Let me be something in this sacred hill. Let me take birth as a fish or a shark in any of the ponds at holy Tirupathi. Even an inanimate existence in the Venkata hill is delightful to me. Let me be a doorstep in front of the *sanctum sanctorum* of Tirupathi. The devotees may stand on me and worship Thee. Let me be a road in the hill leading to Thee. Let me be a pillar of Thy shrine, O Venkatesa! Let me be a Tulasi or jasmine in Thy hill. Let me be a small rivulet that waters Thy flower-garden here, O Venkatachalapathi!"

In every Vaishnava temple, the doorstep in front of the *sanctum sanctorum* is still known as "Kulasekhara's step".

His God-vision

Kulasekhara always prayed to the Lord, "When shall I have Thy magnificent vision, O Lord Rama? I am restless. When shall I stand in Thy sweet presence? When will my restless mind be fixed at Thy lotus feet? When will my heart melt and be filled with intense love for Thee alone? I shall not mix with the worldly-minded people. I shall live in the company of devotees".

Kulasekhara had the Darshan of Lord Narayana one night. He was drowned in the ocean of divine bliss.

He lived amidst pious devotees and spent his time in prayer, worship, meditation, Kirtan and hearing of holy scriptures.

His works

As Kulasekhara was an ardent devotee of Lord Rama, called in Tamil 'Perumal', and as he identified himself with the Lord, he was called Kulasekhara Perumal and his Tamil poem was called '*Perumal Thirumozhi*', a collection of 105 Tamil verses. It is included in the first part of the *Divya*

Prabhandam. Half of the collection glorifies the temples which he had visited. The twenty verses on Lord Krishna are pregnant with Madhurya Bhav. The ten verses that pertain to Chitrakut give a description of the chief incidents in the life of Lord Rama. It is the strong belief of the Vaishnavas that a repetition of these ten verses would bestow on one as much merit as a reading of the whole Ramayana.

Kulasekhara stayed at Srirangam for several years. He sang *Mukunda Mala* in Sanskrit. It consists of forty stanzas. This is a very reputed work of Kulasekhara.

Kulasekhara has sung many hymns on the Lilas of Sri Krishna and Sri Rama, on the love of the Gopis and the glory of Krishna, and on the glory of Rama and His chivalrous deeds.

Kulasekhara Alwar died in his 67th year in a small village known as Brahmadesam near Azhwar Thirunagari in Tirunelveli district.

THONDARADIPPODI ALWAR

Thondaradippodi Alwar was born in a Choliya Brahmin family in Thirumandangudi. The traditional date of his birth is Tuesday, Krishna Paksha, Chaturdasi, Margazhi, Prabhava, in the 289th year of the Kali Era. He was named Vipranarayana. He was devoted to God Ranganatha of Srirangam. He is regarded as the incarnation of the Tulasi garland of Lord Hari. He had a flower garden in Srirangam and offered garlands daily to the Lord.

Thondaradippodi Alwar was well-versed in the Vedic lore. He had intense Vairagya. He lived in a hut in his garden and lived upon the Prasad of Lord Ranganatha. He sang the glory of the Lord.

One day a beautiful dancing girl, a prostitute named Devadevi, and her elder sister visited the beautiful garden of Vipranarayana. Vipranarayana was busy watering the plants. He was reciting the names of the Lord. He did not look at the girls. The elder sister said, "His mind is ever fixed on the Lord. No woman can tempt him". Devadevi said, "I will make him my slave". The elder sister said, "It is all a vain hope. If you can tempt him, I shall be your slave for six months". Devadevi said, "If I do not succeed in tempting this man, I shall be your slave for six months".

Devadevi put on the garb of a Sannyasini and stood before Vipranarayana. Vipranarayana said, "Devi, who are you? What do you want?".

The Sannyasini said, "O adorable devotee! My mother wishes that I should lead the life of a prostitute. I have flatly refused to do so. I have come under thy shelter. Please protect me. I shall live at the foot of this tree, look after the garden, make garlands for the Lord and take the remnants of your dish. I shall serve you in all ways". Vipranarayana was moved with pity. He permitted Devadevi to live at a distance in the garden.

One day there was a very good downpour of rain. The poor Sannyasini's only cloth was drenched in rain. She was shivering. Vipranarayana's heart was touched by per pitiable state. He asked her to come inside his house. He gave her his dry clothes. Both were alone. She eventually fascinated him and made him her slave and quite forgetful of God. He went to her house at last and lived with her. He lost his prosperity, his virtue, his devotion, his garden and Lord Ranga. He became a slave of lust and a slave of Devadevi.

Vipranarayana gave everything to Devadevi. One day he went without any money and knocked at her door. Devadevi said, "Who is that?". Vipra said, "Your lover".

Devadevi: "What have you brought?"

Vipra: "Beloved Devadevi, I have brought my passion."

Devadevi: "Have you brought money?"

Vipra: "I have given you everything. I have not got even a pie with me now."

Devadevi: "Get away. Do not come here in future."

Vipra: "Open the door, Devadevi. I am dying of passion."

Devadevi: "Leave this place at once."

Vipra was ever thinking of Devadevi only.

Lord Ranganatha took a gold plate belonging to the temple and knocked at the door of Devadevi.

Devadevi: "Who is there?"

Lord Ranganatha: "I am the servant of Vipra."

Devadevi: "What is the matter?"

Lord Ranga: "Vipra has sent you a gold plate."

Devadevi: "Come inside."

Devadevi opened the door and said, "Please ask my beloved Vipra to come at once. Tell him that I am pining for him."

Lord Ranga: "All right."

Lord Ranganatha went to Vipra. Vipra was in a state of swoon. Ranga said, "Rise up, Vipra! Devadevi is immensely pleased with you. She calls you at once". Vipra ran to her.

Devadevi treated Vipra with much respect. He stayed with her that night.

In the morning, the loss of the plate was found out in the temple. The police made a vigorous search. The plate was found out in Devadevi's house. Devadevi said that Vipra had sent her the plate through his servant. Vipra said that he had no servant and that he never sent her a gold plate. The plate was restored to the temple. Devadevi was fined for having accepted a stolen article. Vipra was put into prison by order of the King of Nisulapuri (Woraiyur, Tiruchirapalli).

The king had a dream at night. Lord Ranganatha appeared in his dream and said, "I gave the plate to Devadevi. I did this to redeem my devotee. Vipra is quite innocent. Send him back to his garden". The king at once released Vipra.

Vipra asked holy men what was the expiation for his sins. They told him that taking the dust of the feet of Sri Vaishnavas and drinking the water used for washing their feet were the highest expiation. Vipra acted accordingly and he came to be known as Thondaradippodi Alwar or one who wore on his head the dust of the feet of the devotees.

Thondaradippodi Alwar went to the temple of Lord Ranganatha with tears in his eyes, repented very much and said, "O Lord Ranga! Forgive me my sins. I fell under the clutches of a woman. I lost my sense and my understanding. I became a miserable wretch. I forgot Thee. I did not pray and sing Thy glory. O Lord of compassion! Thou hast redeemed me. Thou hast saved me. I am Thy slave. Shower Thy grace on me. Thou art Pathithapavana. Thou art Bhaktavatsala. Thou art my Father, Mother, Guru, Master and Friend. I shall not leave Thy lotus feet. I have made total surrender unto Thee alone, Lord Ranga!". He went to the temple daily and sang sweetly the names and glory of the Lord. He sang the song of awakening, "Rise up Ranga, rise up in my heart!".

Thondaradippodi Alwar lived for 105 years at Srirangam and then attained the abode of Lord Hari. His beautiful hymns are *Thirumalai* and *Thiruppalliezhuchi*.

Thondaradippodi Alwar and Thirumangai Alwar were contemporaries; and hence, Thondaradippodi Alwar also seems to have belonged to the 6th century A.D.

Devadevi also got disgusted with her immoral life. She gave up all her property to the temple and became a humble devotee of Lord Ranganatha.

THIRUPPAN ALWAR

Thiruppan Alwar was born in Woraiyur, near Tiruchirapalli. His traditional date of birth is Durmathi, Karthigai, Krishna Paksha Dvitiya, Wednesday, in the 342nd year of the Kali Era. He was known by the name Munivahana as he was carried to the temple on the shoulders of Saranga Muni. He is regarded as the incarnation of Srivatsa, a mark on Sri Vishnu's chest.

Thiruppan Alwar was not born of human parentage. He was picked up from a rice field and was brought up by a Panchama couple and so he was a Harijan.

Thiruppan Alwar was devoted to Lord Ranganatha and used to sing God's praise in beautiful songs. He was therefore called Thiruppan Alwar. He longed to go to the temple at Srirangam, but dared not do so on account of his low caste. He left Woraiyur and came to Srirangam. He built a small hut on the southern bank of the Cauvery and sang hymns in praise of Lord Ranga upon his Veena or lute.

One day, Lokasaranga Jeer went to the Cauvery to bring water in a golden vessel for Lord Ranganatha's Abhishekam or ritual bath. Thiruppan Alwar stood close by lost in devotional meditation. So he did not move away when the Brahmins came. The Brahmins hit him with a stone on his forehead. Blood flowed freely from his forehead. He begged pardon of the Brahmins and moved away.

When the Jeer went back to the temple, he found blood flowing from God's forehead. Lord Ranganatha appeared in the dream of the Jeer and said, "The low-caste man whom you hit with a stone is a great saint. He is very dear to me. Bring the saint to me on your shoulders".

The Jeer entered the hut of the devotee. He fell at the feet of the devotee and said, "Lord Ranganatha has ordered me to carry you to His holy presence. Kindly sit on my shoulders". Thiruppan Alwar seriously objected and said, "I am a low-caste man. I cannot get upon your shoulders".

The Jeer took the Alwar on his shoulders and left him before Lord Ranganatha. The joy of the Alwar knew no bounds. He danced in his ecstasy. The Alwar saw God face to face and praised Him in the stanzas known as '*Amalanadipiran*'. He said, "O Lord Ranga! I have not done any rigorous Tapas for such a great blessing. Thou art my saviour. Thou art an ocean of compassion. I am Thine. I am Thy slave!".

The Alwar disappeared in Godhead. A brilliant light was seen. The Alwar vanished into that divine flame.

It is difficult to state the exact historical date of this saint. He probably belonged to the same time as Thondaradippodi Alwar or Thirumangai Alwar.

THIRUMANGAI ALWAR

Thirumangai Alwar was born in Thirukuraiyalur in the Chola Desa. His traditional date of birth is Nala, Karthikai, Full Moon, Thursday, in the 398th year of the Kali Era. Thirumangai Alwar was known by the names Parakala and Nila. He is regarded as the incarnation of the bow Saranga of Lord Hari. He was a petty chieftain. He was a brave warrior and a dauntless hero. He was the commander of the army of the Chola king.

Nila wanted to marry Kumudavalli, a pious virgin who lived in Thiruvali. She was a great devotee of Lord Hari. She refused to marry one who was not a Sri Vaishnava. Then Nila got himself initiated into Vaishnavism. Then Kumudavalli said, "This outward conversion is nothing. You must daily feed 1008 Bhaktas for one year and bring their Prasad to me every day". Nila consented. He fed 1008 Vaishnavas daily for a year. Kumudavalli then married Nila and they lived happily.

Nila spent all his wealth in the service of devotees. So he was unable to pay the tribute to the Chola king. The king put him in prison. Then the Lord appeared in Nila's dream and said, "There is abundant wealth buried in the bed of the Vegavati river in Kancheepuram. Take it and pay the tribute". Nila took the treasure that was buried underneath the bed of the river and paid the tribute to the king. Afterwards he took to robbery and used for God's service the wealth plundered by him from rich wicked men.

One day Lord Hari and Goddess Lakshmi desired to save him. The Lord assumed the form of a Brahmin and Goddess Lakshmi assumed the form of his wife. They came as bridegroom and bride returning from a marriage. Nila robbed them of their ornaments and put those into a box. There was a ring on the finger of the Brahmin. Nila said, "Give that ring to me. You do not want the golden ring!". The Brahmin said, "It is difficult to remove it". Nila said, "I shall remove it". He applied his mouth and removed the ring.

Nila tried to lift the box, but could not do it. He said to the Brahmin, "You have done some trick. You have made it heavy by the force of some Mantra. Tell me the Mantra. Else I will kill you". Then Lord Hari in the guise of the Brahmin whispered the holy Ashtakshari, the eight-lettered Mantra *Om Namo Narayanaya*, into Nila's ears. The Lord then revealed His glorious form to Nila. Nila fell at the Lord's lotus feet and obtained His grace.

Nila composed the sacred hymns known as *Peria Thirumozhi*, *Thirukuruthandagam*, *Thirunedunthandagam*, *Thiruvezhukoorirukkai*, *Siria Thirumadal* and *Peria Thirumadal*. He said with tears of repentance, "I have wasted my life in lust. The Lord has saved me. I committed atrocious crimes. I plundered even the Lord. I was very wicked. The Name of the Lord has saved me. Hail, Hari! Hail, Vishnu!!".

A voice was heard from above: "Fear not, Thirumangai Alwar! You have not offended Me. Go to Srirangam. Complete the construction of the temple. Disseminate Bhakti far and wide. Worship Me with the garlands of your beautiful hymns and then come to Me".

Thirumangai Alwar went from temple to temple and composed hymns in respect of eighty-six temples. He met the great Sivacharya Thiru Jnana Sambandhar at Sirgazhi and was honoured by him. Thus he seems to have belonged to the 6th century A.D.

Thirumangai Alwar brought away a golden image of the Buddha from Nagapattinam and used the gold in it to build the temple walls of Srirangam. He reached the abode of eternal bliss, Vaikuntha, in his 105th year.

Nammalwar came to Srirangam from Azhwar Thirunagari. Thirumangai Alwar gave him a grand reception and listened with intense devotion to his inspiring hymns.

Thirumangai Alwar's message is: "Repeat constantly the names of Lord Vishnu. Remember Him always. Do total self-surrender unto the Lord and obtain His grace. Be attached to His lotus feet. Lord Narayana is our saviour and redeemer. He is the ocean of compassion. Serve the Bhaktas. A Bhakta and the Lord are one. Sing His glory. Dance in divine ecstasy. Live in Lord Hari. Repeat His thousand names. Study Vishnusahasranama".

THIRUMAZHISAI ALWAR

Thirumazhisai Alwar was also known by the name Bhaktisara. He was called after his birthplace as Thirumazhisai Alwar. He was the son of sage Bhrigu, one of the Brahma-Rishis, and an Apsara or heavenly nymph named Kanakangi or Kanakavati. His birthplace was Mahisara or Mahisarapuram, corrupted into Mazhisai or Thirumazhisai, a village near Madras.

Some say that this Alwar belonged to the sixth or the seventh century A.D. It is only a guess.

As soon as Thirumazhisai Alwar was born, the mother threw him away into a bush of canes on account of his awkward appearance and ill-developed form. A woodcutter called Tiruvallan came there with his wife Pankajavalli to cut canes. They found the child and took him to their house. The child would not drink milk from the human breast. An old farmer used to take milk for the Alwar and the child used to accept it because the giver was a man of pure heart and true godliness. One day this farmer gave a portion of the milk which the Alwar drank to his wife. A wonderful child was born to them by virtue of the Prasada. He was named Kannikannan or Kanni Krishnan. This Kannikannan became Bhaktisara's playmate in his boyhood, and later, his ardent devotee.

Bhaktisara was immersed in devotion from his early days. He proved to be a born genius. He mastered all the sacred scriptures. He made a comparative study of the Vedic and the non-Vedic religions. He gained a profound knowledge of Vedanta, Saivism, Buddhism and Jainism. He studied various faiths and came to the conclusion that he should follow Saivism. He became an ardent lover of Saivism. He was called Sivavakya when he was thus a Saivite. He wrote books on Saivism and began its propagation. He sang many songs on Siva.

Peyalwar wanted to convert Sivavakya to Vaishnavism. He thought that Sivavakya could be of immense help if converted to Vaishnavism. One day he planted some flower plants, roots upwards, and started watering them with water from a pot full of holes. Sivavakya saw this and laughed at this. Peyalwar replied, "When you go from faith to faith ignoring the true faith, can you do good to your soul? When you are doing a ridiculous act, why do you laugh at me? In spite of your comparative study of all religions, you have not yet found the true religion and the Supreme Lord". At once Sivavakya's eyes were opened. He entered into a discussion with Peyalwar. He was defeated. He became a Vaishnavite and a disciple of Peyalwar. He received the Dasya-nama of "Thirumazhisai Alwar".

Kannikannan, the ardent devotee of Thirumazhisai Alwar, served his master faithfully. An aged lady was also serving the Alwar with great zeal and faith. The Alwar was very much pleased with the old woman. He said to the woman, "Ask a boon, I shall grant you". The old woman said, "O adorable lord, make me young again". The Alwar transformed her into a beautiful girl by his spiritual power. The Pallava king who was then ruling Kanchi fell in love with this girl and married her.

Time passed and the king found that his wife's beauty and youth remained the same while he was becoming older and older. The king asked his wife, "What is the secret of your youth and beauty?".

The queen said, "There is a great devotee, Thirumazhisai Alwar, near the tank of the temple of Vishnu. He is a great Yogi too. Kannikannan is his disciple. He comes here daily for getting alms. You can approach the Alwar through his disciple and obtain boons".

The king called Kannikannan and said, "Bring your Guru to me. I will give him presents". Kannikannan said, "O king! My preceptor will not come here. He has no desire to obtain any royal favour. He obeys only the Supreme King, Lord Hari, the Ruler of the three worlds".

Thereupon the king said, "O Kannikannan! Compose a verse in praise of me. I shall give you presents". Kannikannan replied, "I sing only the glory of the Lord and His devotees. I do not sing the glory of mundane, mortal rulers who are full of faults".

The king was greatly annoyed towards Kannikannan and said, "How impertinent you are! You have refused to sing my glory. You have dishonoured me. Leave my kingdom at once". Kannikannan said, "Yes, O king! I shall leave your kingdom immediately".

Kannikannan reported to his preceptor what had happened. The Alwar then resolved to go with Kannikannan. He asked the local Deity also to leave the land. The Alwar and his disciple left the kingdom. The Lord also rolled up his serpent-bedding and accompanied the Alwar and Kannikannan to a village nearby.

The kingdom lost its prosperity. The departure of the Deity cast a gloom everywhere. There was no rain. The king realised that the calamity was due to his impertinent attitude towards Kannikannan and to his banishment. He went to the place where the Alwar and his disciple were sojourning, shed tears of repentance and called them back to Kanchi. They returned to their original abode. The Alwar then entreated the Lord to return to His temple. The Alwar prayed, "Seshasayee! Kannikannan has returned. I have also returned. Please take your bed again in the temple". The Lord also returned. The kingdom prospered. The temple became brilliant again.

The Alwar then went to worship the Deity at Kumbakonam. On his way he went to Perumbuliyur (probably Chidambaram). Some Brahmins were chanting the Vedas. They suddenly stopped the chanting as soon as they saw the Alwar. They took him for a non-Brahmin or a man of low caste. But when they began to resume the chant, they could not recollect where they had halted earlier. The Alwar realised their difficulty. He took a grain of black paddy that was on the path and began to split it. The Brahmins noticed this and at once remembered that they had left chanting at a passage beginning with, *"Krishnanam Vrihinam Nakha Nirbhinnanem"* (Yajur Veda, 1-9). The Brahmins said, "Excuse our folly. You are not an ordinary man. You are a Mahatma (Great One)".

When the Alwar was passing along the streets of the village, the Presiding Deity of the temple turned to wherever the Alwar went. This was reported to a Dikshitar who was performing a sacrifice at that time. The Dikshitar invited the Alwar to the sacrificial hall and paid him due respects. This was resented by other Brahmins. They treated the Alwar with contempt.

The Dikshitar prayed to the Alwar to teach the Brahmins a lesson. The Alwar exhibited on his person the wonderful form of Lord Hari. The Brahmins begged pardon of the Alwar.

The Alwar reached Kumbakonam. In response to the request of the Alwar, the local Deity, Aravamudar, half rose from His serpent-couch. It maintains that posture even today. This incident is found in a verse in the Alwar's poem *Thiruchandaviruttam*.

At Kumbakonam, the Alwar threw into the Cauvery two of his works—*Thiruchandaviruttam* and *Nanmukhan Thiruvantadi*. He was so humble and non-egoistic that he would not publish even his own poems. But the two works swam against the current and fl*oated back to the banks.*

Thiruchandavriruttam is a poem which consists of a hundred and twenty stanzas. *Nanmukhan Thiruvantadi* is a poem consisting of ninety-six verses. Both of them have been included in the *Divya Prabhandam*, a collection of the Tamil works of all the Alwars. As Thirumazhisai Alwar was a convert from Saivism to Vaishnavism, we see in his works traces of bigoted devotion.

The Alwar made Kumbakonam his permanent place of residence. He died there at a very advanced age. Tradition says that he lived for four thousand and seven hundred years through his Yogic powers.

This Alwar's message is: "Narayana is the Supreme Lord. He is the sole refuge. There is great power in the names of the Lord. Yama, the Lord of Death, whispers into the ears of his messengers that they should not approach the devotees of Lord Hari. Feel His presence everywhere. He dwells in your heart. He is your protector at all times and stages. Love the Lord. Do self-surrender and obtain His grace. You will attain eternal bliss and immortality".

ANDAL

Andal is said to be the incarnation of Goddess Earth or Bhudevi, one of the three consorts of Lord Vishnu. She was specially sent down here to earth to reveal the delight of divine love. She was born at Srivilliputhur in Ramanathapuram district in South India. She was found under a Tulasi bush in the flower-garden of Vishnuchitta, better known as Periyalwar, just as Sita was found by King Janaka in a furrow of his sacrificial field. The traditional date of Andal's birth is the 98th year of the Kali Era.

Periyalwar took the child and laid her at the feet of Vatapatrasayin, the Deity of the local temple, saying, "This priceless treasure is but Thine, meant for Thy service". A heavenly voice spoke, "Vishnuchitta! Call this divine child *Kothai* and nurse her as your own daughter". '*Kothai*' means 'beautiful like a garland of flowers'. She was call *Andal*, because she obtained the grace and love of Lord Ranganatha. She was also known by the name *Ranganayaki*.

Andal was a remarkable, lovely, precocious child. When she prattled, it was only the name of Lord Hari. She did not play like the other girls. She collected flowers and prepared garlands for the Lord. She worked in the flower-garden with her father. She sang the Lord's glory. She found delight in reading or hearing the Puranas.

Andal was intensely devoted to Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam. She dedicated her life to Him alone. She ever thought of Ranga. She ever praised Ranga. She reached the pinnacle of Madhurya Bhav, the attitude of lover-beloved.

Andal would put on the garland meant for the Lord and admire her beauty in the mirror saying, "Will I be accepted by my Lord Ranganatha? Am I beautiful to kindle His love?". She did like this daily. One day the temple priest refused the garland as there was a hair in it. Periyalwar collected fresh flowers and prepared fresh garlands for the Lord that day.

Another day the priest complained that the garland was slightly faded. Periyalwar tried to find out the cause of this.

One day Periyalwar happened to see from behind a curtain what his daughter was doing. She wore the fresh garlands and stood before the mirror, saying, "O Lord Ranganatha! My sweet Beloved! Do You love my beauty now?". She was in great joy. Her father ran to her and said, "O my beloved daughter! What are you doing? You have polluted the garland meant for the Lord. Please do not do like this in future".

Periyalwar prepared again fresh garlands and offered them to the Lord. That night Periyalwar had a dream. The Lord appeared in his dream and said, "The garlands worn by Andal are very agreeable to Me. Offer those alone to Me. She is My bride, the Goddess of Earth, who has incarnated in human form. Bring only the garlands worn by her". From that day onwards Andal was known as Soodi Kodutha Nachiyar, meaning one who wore the garlands herself and then gave them to the Lord.

Srivilliputhur became Brindavan for Andal. She regarded other women as Gopis and called them all to worship Krishna. Her playmates became Gopis. Vatapatrasayin became Sri Krishna. Andal was like a Gopi. She loved Sri Krishna like a Gopi. She had intense longing for Sri Krishna. Along with her playmates, Andal used to enact scenes from Sri Krishna's life. Her beautiful poems, *Thiruppavai* and *Nachiyar Thirumozhi*, give a delighted description of such scenes and are full of great sweetness and charm.

Periyalwar began to search for a bridegroom for Andal in his own community. Andal said to her father, "I will not marry a mortal. My mind is centred on Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam. I have consecrated my life unto Him alone. He is my husband. He is my Lord. He is my all. Let the lovely hands of Sri Krishna alone possess me. I shall cease to live if I am wedded to a mortal. I will marry only Lord Ranganatha".

Periyalwar had a dream in which the Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam directed him to bring his daughter to that sacred place in bridal dress. A similar dream was experienced by the executive officers of the Srirangam temple.

Andal was taken to Srirangam in her fourteenth year. She saw the Lord on His Sesha couch inside the sanctum. At once Andal became one with Him. Her desire in life was fulfilled. She showed to the world the glory of devotion to the Lord.

Andal sang *Thiruppavai* when she was only five years of age. This contains thirty verses of great charm and beauty. The other collection consists of a hundred and forty-three verses in fourteen decades. The *Thiruppavai* is recited by Sri Vaishnavas every dawn.

Thiruppavai is a description of a Vrata observed in the month of December. It is based on a story which occurs in the Bhagavata. The Gopis performed the Vrata in honour of Katyayani Devi in order to join Lord Krishna.

Nachiyar Thirumozhi reveals Andal's devotion to the Lord. She prays to Kama in her longing to see Lord Krishna. She falls at the feet of the cuckoo. She sends a cloud as her messenger. She enjoys Him in her dream. She requests her father and relatives to take her to where He is. Eventually the Lord appears and accepts Andal. A decade of this collection is sung by all Sri Vaishnavas during their marriages. The last line of the poem is a benediction to the married couple.

Andal regards other women as Gopis and calls them all to worship Krishna:

"Wake up! O lovely ones of sweet Brindavan! Birds have started their singing. The temple conch is being blown. Do you not hear this sound? Do you not hear the sound of the curd churned by the Gopis? Are you deaf? Let us take bath in the sparkling Yamuna and behold Lord Krishna, the Flute-bearer of Brindavan, the Joy of Devaki, and worship Him with fresh flowers. Wake up, O daughters! Do not sleep any more. Open your door! The lotus opens!

"Are you still sleeping? Shame. Arise! Be quick! The Brahmamuhurta will go away. This is the best time for singing the Lord's glory, for prayer and meditation".

Andal addresses the Lord thus: "We have come to Thy sweet sacred Presence, O Lord! Enthrone Thyself in our heart. Make us ever remember Thee. Let the divine flame burn in us steadily, O Govinda! Direct Thy gracious gaze on us, O Janardhana! Let us serve Thee always. Grant us this boon, O

Achyuta! Let us abide in Thee for ever. Let our minds be attached to Thy holy lotus feet, O Kesava! Let all our unholy desires perish. Let Thy Name be ever on our lips, O Madhava!

"Glory to Thy feet which are worshipped by the Yogis, which measured the three worlds! Glory to Thee, O Lion that came roaring out of the pillar to protect Prahlada and to tear the dreadful Hiranya! Glory to Thee, O Saviour who danced on the hood of Kalinga! Glory to Thee, O Yogi who multiplied in the Rasalila dance and pleased the thirsty Gopis!".

Andal's marriage with the Lord is celebrated with great pomp in several of the Vaishnava temples of South India in the month of July.

Glory to Andal, Bhudevi, Goddess Earth! Salutations to Her. May Her blessings be upon you all!

SAINT ALAVANDAR

Madurai was ruled by a Pandyan king in the twelfth century. It was a centre of Tamil learning. The king was a great patron of learning. The queen also was very learned.

Vidvajjnana Kolahala was a famous Pundit. The king patronized him. Kolahala was the terror of the Pundits. He was very arrogant and egoistic. He exacted tributes from other learned men. None dared to challenge him. He had a very cruel heart. He moved about in a palanquin. Many people followed him. They made an advertisement of his learning. If any Pundit kept in arrears the tribute due to Kolahala, Kolahala was very harsh towards him.

These are not the signs of a real learned Pundit. Learning instils pride and self-conceit in the heart and stiffens egoism. Soon pride brings destruction.

Bhashyacharya was a humble teacher. The agent of Kolahala, Rama Sastri, came to Bhashyacharya's school. Bhashyacharya was absent. Rama Sastri said to a boy named Yamuna, "Tell your master to come to Pundit Kolahala with his tribute today. If he does not turn up today, the result will be disastrous". The boy replied, "Our master will not pay even a pie to arrogant and proud fools. Go and tell your Pundit Kolahala like this".

Kolahala became furious when he heard the impertinent reply of Yamuna. He called Bhashyacharya for a debate. Bhashyacharya became nervous. Yamuna said, "Adorable Guru! Tell that Kolahala that your disciple shall challenge him in any debate. I shall curb his self-conceit and earn undying glory for you". Bhashyacharya agreed with diffidence.

Yamuna went to the court of the Pandyan king, took his seat boldly in front of Pundit Kolahala. All people thought that the boy would be defeated by the Pundit. The king also was of the same opinion. But the queen was quite sure that the boy would win. She said to the king, "If this boy does not defeat the Pundit, I shall become your slave". The king said, "If this boy wins, I shall give him half my kingdom".

The debate commenced. The Pundit put some intricate questions to the boy. The boy gave correct answers. The Pundit said, "O impertinent boy, now put me any question you like. I shall answer".

Yamuna said, "Pundit, I say that your mother is not barren. Our king is virtuous. The queen is chaste. Deny this if you can". The Pundit was in a great dilemma. He could not give any answer.

The king said, "Yamuna! Now deny the statements yourself".

Yamuna said, "One tree cannot make a grove. One child cannot become a child. Punditji's mother brought forth only one son. Hence she is regarded as a barren woman only. The king cannot be perfectly virtuous as he shares the sins of his subjects. A woman is first offered to Agni, Varuna and Indra and then to her husband. So, the queen is not chaste".

The Pundit hung his head down in shame. The audience applauded the young genius. The king admired Yamuna's high intellectual acumen and gave him half the kingdom. The queen called him 'Alavandar' or 'One come to rule'.

Yamuna became the ruler. Pundit Kolahala became his servant. Bhashyacharya's joy knew no bounds. Yamuna ruled the kingdom justly and wisely. He maintained order and peace.

Alavandar was the grandson of Nathamuni, a great devotee. His father passed away when he was ten years old. Nathamuni dedicated Alavandar to the service of Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam.

Manakkal Nambi was a disciple of Nathamuni. He was a great scholar and Bhakta. Nathamuni died when Alavandar was a small child. Nathamuni said these last words to Manakkal Nambi: "Beloved Nambi, show to my grandson when he attains manhood the great treasure which was very dear to me throughout my life. It is a priceless treasure. This is the rich legacy that I leave behind to Alavandar. Let him find it in the sanctum of Lord Ranganatha".

King Alavandar was not satisfied with his kingly life. He longed for inner, everlasting peace of the soul. He was in need of a large sum of money to wage war with his enemies. Manakkal Nambi came to Madurai at this critical hour. He wanted to convert Alavandar and deliver to him the message of his Guru, Nathamuni. He approached the cook who prepared food for Alavandar. He gave him a sweet herb—Divya Amrit Bhuti—daily and said, "Add this herb to the vegetables. The king will relish it nicely". The cook acted accordingly. Alavandar liked the vegetables immensely. One day Nambi did not bring the herb. Alavandar did not relish the vegetables that day.

Alavandar asked the cook, "Why was not the vegetable palatable today?". The cook said, "My lord, that devotee did not bring the herb today". Alavandar: "Which devotee?." Cook: "A devotee brings a herb and says, 'Add this herb and serve it to the king'." Alavandar: "Bring that devotee to me." The cook brought Manakkal Nambi before Alavandar.

Alavandar said: "O devotee, your herb satisfied not only my palate but also my soul. I am grateful to you. Kindly ask for any favour from me. I shall give you a big treasure".

Nambi: "O king, I have not come here to get any treasure from you. On the contrary, I have come to show you a great treasure, the Treasure of treasures, to which you are heir."

Alavandar: "What is that treasure? How am I heir to it? Where is that treasure? I am in dire need of money for a war."

Nambi: "O king! Listen to me with rapt attention. Nathamuni was your grandfather. I am his devoted disciple. When he was about to expire, he entrusted me with the greatest Treasure of treasures."

Alavandar: "O adorable devotee! My grandfather was really very kind to me. He has given me a very rich treasure. I am really in need of that treasure now. Please tell me where that priceless treasure is."

Nambi: "That treasure is between two rivers. A big snake guards it. There is a Mantra to get hold of that treasure. If you attain that treasure, you really attain everything. All your desires will be gratified. You must have pure love and strength of will to obtain it."

Alavandar: "O devotee! Come now and show me that treasure. I shall surely possess it in the name of my revered, kind grandfather. I have certainly pure love and strength of will to get it."

Nambi: "Abandon all attachment to worldly objects and follow me. Have intense concentration, burning aspiration and intense faith. You will attain that treasure now."

Alavandar handed over the reins of government to responsible persons and started with Nambi to find out that treasure. Nambi was a great votary of the Bhagavad Gita. He studied daily the eighteen chapters of the Gita. Alavandar listened to the Gita with faith, devotion and perfect concentration. This purified his mind. Alavandar said, "O adorable devotee! Thou art my Guru. Kindly initiate me into the real Tattva of the Gita. I am anxious to drink the Gita's nectar". Nambi initiated Alavandar into the real essence of the Gita.

Alavandar lost himself in contemplation of the Gita. He reflected thus: "What is the use of this kingdom? I have no peace of mind in ruling a kingdom. I have wasted my life till now. My eyes have been opened by this great devotee. I know now what is real and what is unreal. The Gita contains a vast treasure. Study of the Gita gives me peace of mind. I find solace in the company of this devotee. He is dear to me. I shall dedicate my life to the service of God. I shall live in God. I will make a total self-surrender to the Lord who is the ruler of the three worlds. Royal life is full of vanity. I do not want to sit on a throne. Let God enthrone Himself in my heart. I do not want any worldly treasure. It is all a broken piece of glass". Reflecting thus, Alavandar spoke to Nambi: "O teacher! Guide me to attain the mighty Treasure of treasures".

Nambi found out that the heart of Alavandar was quite pure. He said, "O king! The treasure is a permanent one. Follow me now. I shall show you the treasure".

Both came to Srirangam. They entered the temple of Lord Ranganatha. Puja was going on. The Brahmins were chanting the Vedas. Devotees were singing the hymns of the Alwars. The priest was waving the light. Now Nambi told Alavandar: "Behold now. This is the Treasure of treasures that your pious grandfather has left as a legacy to you. Between Cauvery and Coleroon, in the temple of Lord Ranga, is this treasure. Adisesha guards it. Possess it now. Take charge of the treasure. Enjoy it to your heart's content. *Om Namo Narayanaya* is the Mantra to attain it".

Alavandar lost himself in divine ecstasy. He forgot all about his kingdom. He said, "I am grateful to my pious grandfather who has bequeathed such a priceless treasure. O teacher! I bow to thee: you have shown me the way to attain this Treasure of treasures. O Lord Hari! I surrender myself unto Thee. Thou art my saviour and sole refuge. Prostrations unto Thee again and again. Devotion to Thy lotus feet is my great treasure. All my desires have vanished. I have peace of mind now. I was preparing for an external warfare. But the real enemies—lust, greed, anger, pride, jealousy and egoism—are lurking within my heart. I have killed them through Thy powerful Mantra *Om Namo Narayanaya*. My master, Nambi, has shown me the priceless treasure. Thou art my eternal, inexhaustible treasure. The treasure of this world is evanescent. It is worthless. Thou art abiding in my heart. Thou art my life, my soul, my all".

Alavandar settled in Srirangam. He spent his days in Japa, Kirtan, meditation and worship of Lord Ranganatha.

Saints
of
Maharashtra

SAMARTHA RAMDAS

Ramdas was one of the greatest saints of the world. He was the inspirer of Shivaji. He was born of Suryaji Panth and Renuka Bai in Jamb, Maharashtra, in 1608 A.D. His original name was Narain.

Ramdas was a contemporary of Sant Tukaram. He was a great devotee of Hanuman and Lord Rama. He had Darshan of Lord Rama even when he was a boy. Lord Rama Himself initiated him.

As a boy, Ramdas acquired some knowledge of the Hindu scriptures and developed a liking for meditation and religious study. One day he shut himself in a room and began to meditate on God. When his mother asked him what he was doing, Ramdas replied that he was meditating and praying for the good of the world. His mother was surprised at the precocious religious inclination of the boy and felt happy.

When Ramdas was twelve years of age, all arrangements were made for his marriage. He sat in front of the bride. There was a screen between the bridegroom and the bride. When the priests chanted "*Sawadhan!*", Ramdas bolted away from the place and disappeared within the twinkling of an eye.

Studies and penances

For twelve years Ramdas stayed at Nasik on the banks of the Godavari. He used to get up very early in the morning, go into the Godavari river, and with his body half-immersed in water, recite the sacred Gayatri Mantra till about noon. Then he would go round for alms. He first offered the collected food to his Deity Sri Rama and then took it as Prasad. After resting a while, he used to attend religious discourses in the various temples of Nasik and Panchavati. Ramdas also studied Sanskrit and copied in his own hand the Ramayana of Valmiki. This manuscript is still preserved in the collection of Sri S.S. Dev of Dhubliah.

Ramdas did Purascharana of the Rama Mantra of thirteen letters *Sri Ram Jaya Ram Jaya Jaya Ram* thirteen lakhs of times at Tafali, near Nasik, on the banks of the Godavari. After the Purascharana was over, once again Ramdas had Darshan of Lord Rama. It is said that Ramachandra ordered Ramdas to visit holy places such as Nasik, Haridwar, Kasi, etc.

Ramdas sprinkled over a dead body holy water uttering the name of Rama and the dead body was restored to life. Ramdas had to do this, because he had blessed a woman who had just lost her husband.

Pilgrimage

Ramdas was an Advaitin and a Bhakta in one. He had this very noble quality that he never hated any religion or nation. His main object was to spread the Hindu religion throughout India.

Ramdas had not visited Pandharpur, as he had not known the existence of this holy place. One day, the tradition says, Lord Panduranga Vittal, in the form of a Brahmin, with a batch of three hundred pilgrims, appeared before Ramdas and asked him whether he had any objection to see Lord Krishna. Ramdas replied in the negative. Panduranga then took Ramdas to Pandharpur, and when the Bhaktas approached the temple, the Brahmin disappeared. Ramdas then knew that it was none other than the Lord that had brought him to that holy place. He entered the temple, and to his great surprise, found Sri Rama standing alone on a brick.

Ramdas addressed the Deity thus: "O Lord, what are You doing here alone? Where is Your brother Lakshmana and Your consort Sita Mata? Where is Maruti and where are the monkey hordes?". On hearing these words, the image at once transformed itself into Sri Pandarinath. Ramdas then praised Panduranga for His kindness, prostrated before Him and sang songs of joy for getting His rare Darshan. Ramdas now felt doubly convinced that the several incarnations of the Lord were but His several forms and preached that everyone should respect and worship the One who took care of one and all in the world. Ramdas then worshipped Panduranga to his heart's content and became a frequent visitor and Bhakta of Panduranga Vittal also. In Pandharpur, Ramdas came in contact with Tukaram and other saints of Pandharpur. In his pilgrimages, Ramdas observed and studied the social, political and economic conditions of Indians and their utter helplessness in life.

It is said that Sri Rama ordered Ramdas to go to the banks of the Krishna and help the cause of Shivaji, the incarnation of Siva and founder of the Kingdom of Maharashtra. Ramdas came to the Krishna and went about preaching from Mahabaleshwar to Kolhapur. He established eleven principal seats of Maruti which emphasized the importance of physical development. He installed the shrines of Sri Ramachandra at Champavati and introduced Sri Rama Navami Mahotsava and the procession of Sri Rama's chariot. It was at the place called Singanvadi that Shivaji became the disciple of Ramdas.

Shivaji placed the sandals of his Guru on the throne and acted as regent of the kingdom under the orders and guidance of his Guru and adopted as ensign the flag of orange colour. There is a beautiful and romantic incident current in the Maharashtra country about Shivaji's adoption of the Gerua flag and his ruling the kingdom in the name of Saint Ramdas.

One day Shivaji saw, from the terrace of his palace, his Gurudev Ramdas going about the streets with his begging bowl. Shivaji was surprised and could not understand why his Guru should beg when he himself had already placed all his resources at the disposal of his Gurudev. However, Sadhus are difficult to understand. Shivaji therefore called for his companion Balaji, wrote a small chit and asked him to give it to Guruji when he came to the palace. About noon, Ramdas came to the palace with his bowl and Balaji prostrated before Gurudev and placed the chit at his feet. Briefly, the chit conveyed that Shivaji had made a gift of his whole kingdom to Gurudev and he humbly solicited his Gurudev's blessing. The Guru smiled and told Balaji that it was alright. Next morning Ramdas called on Shivaji and asked him what he proposed to do with himself as he had disposed of his kingdom.

Shivaji prostrated himself before Ramdas and said that he would be very happy and consider himself blessed if he should spend his life in his Gurudev's service. Then Ramdas said, "Take this bowl and let us go on our rounds". So Ramdas and Shivaji went round Satara begging. The people reverently bowed before the pair and gave them alms. The pair returned to the river. Ramdas prepared his simple meals and Shivaji partook of what was left after his Gurudev had finished his meals. Then Shivaji, with a smile, asked his Gurudev what he was going to do with him after reducing him to a beggar. Ramdas knew that the opportunity had come to set up a lofty ideal for the king.

Ramdas asked Shivaji to rule the kingdom in his (Ramdas's) name, to take the Gerua Chaddar for his banner and defend its honour with his life, and to think that the kingdom did not belong to himself but treat it as a trust to be ruled justly and well before God. And thus had come the Gerua banner to Shivaji.

Ramdas spent several years in visiting holy places of pilgrimage. He erected several Hanuman temples in Maharashtra. When he returned from his pilgrimage, somebody told Ramdas that his mother was pining for him, and that she had lost her eyesight on account of extreme sorrow arising out of his separation. Ramdas immediately went to see his mother. He made prostrations to his mother. His mother was exceedingly pleased to meet her son after an absence of many years. Ramdas touched the eyes of his mother. She got back her lost eyesight through the Yogic power of her son.

His preachings and life

Ramdas's ways were very peculiar. He appeared to the outside world as a mad man. He had a small bow. He used to have, by his side, a large number of stones with which he pelted every object he saw. To men really interested in his teachings, he gave the Mantra *Sri Ram Jaya Ram Jaya Jaya Ram.*

Ramdas had eleven hundred disciples, of whom three hundred were women. The women disciples were also expert preachers and were virtuous. Ramdas sent his disciples to all parts of India to spread the Hindu religion. His disciples and Mutts in the North directly or indirectly helped Shivaji and his work. Ramdas's organisation in the South, round about Thanjavur, helped Shivaji's son Rajaram to go to Jinji and carry on the Twenty Years' War with Aurangazeb. When Ramdas visited Thanjavur, Venkoji, who was the step-brother of Shivaji, became his disciple. Ramdas appointed Bhimaswami, his direct disciple, as the Mahant of the Thanjavur Mutt.

Last days

Ramdas generally preferred to live in the forest, where he would say, he had better meditation. In his last days, Ramdas devoted his time partly to literary activities and partly to the systematic building up of his disciples and Mutts, both in the North and in the South. The literary works of Ramdas such as *Dasabodh, Manache Shlok* (verse addressed to the mind), *Karunashtakas* (hymns to God) and *Ramayana* (describing only the conquest of Lanka by Sri Rama and the vanquishing of Ravana) are very popular. It was as a tribute to Ramdas's extraordinary patience and determination in rehabilitating the Hindu religion in India that people named him Samartha Ramdas, a name which he richly deserved. This great Guru of Maharashtra breathed his last in 1682 at Sajjangad, near Satara, a fortress which was given to him by Shivaji for his residence.

Ramdas repeated the Rama Mantra with his last breath. At the time of his departure from the world, a dazzling light emanated from his body and Ramdas was absorbed in the image of Lord Rama.

The last instructions of Ramdas to his disciples were: "Do not think much of your bodily wants. Have Satsang with devotees. Keep the image of Lord Rama in your heart. Repeat the name of Lord Rama always. Annihilate lust, greed, anger, hatred and egoism. See Lord Rama in all creatures. Love all. Feel His presence everywhere. Live for Him alone. Serve Him in all beings. Make total and unreserved surrender unto Him. You will always live in Him alone. You will attain immortality and eternal bliss".

NAMDEV

Namdev of Maharashtra was a saint of mediaeval India. He was not a servant of Lord Krishna, but His companion. Namdev was an Amsa of Lord Krishna.

Namdev was a contemporary of Jnanadev, the famous saint of Maharashtra, being his senior in age by about five years. He was born in 1269 A.D. He came of a family of tailors who were sincere devotees of Vittala of Pandharpur. The family members were observing the *Wari* of Pandharpur, i.e., going on pilgrimage twice a year on the first eleventh day of the Ashadh and Kartik months. The family originated from a village called Narsibamani on the bank of the river Krishna, near Karad, in district Satara. Being a great devotee of Vittala and wishing to improve his material prospects, Dama Setti, the father of Namdev, had moved to Pandharpur a year or two before his son's birth.

Namdev, from his very childhood, was like Prahlad. At the age of two, when he began to talk, the first correct word he uttered was 'Vittala', and since then, he continued with the repetition of that sacred name incessantly, without any help or instruction from others. He found great pleasure when every day his mother Guna Bai took him to the temple of Vithoba for offering worship to the Deity. His next step was, when at the age of about seven, he prepared a pair of cymbals and spent his time in dancing and singing, doing Bhajan, to the neglect of everything—food, studies in school, rest, sleep, etc. His devotion to Vithoba was so innocent and sincere that he used to treat Him sometimes as his dearest brother or as his playmate.

One day, as Namdev's mother was busy, she asked Namdev to take the plate of offerings to Vithoba. Namdev went to the temple, placed the plate of eatables before Vithoba and asked Him to accept the offering. However, when Namdev did not find any evidence of acceptance by Vithoba, he cried so bitterly that Vithoba actually assumed a human form and accepted the offerings gratefully. Namdev's mother was surprised when her son came back in great joy with an empty plate and explained to her that Vithoba had accepted the offerings by actually consuming the eatables presented in the plate. So, the next day, she herself accompanied Namdev (but without his knowledge) to see and verify for herself the correctness of Namdev's explanation. The same performance was repeated and the mother had the satisfaction of seeing the Lord actually accepting their offerings. Her joy and pride in Namdev was unbounded. She felt grateful to the Lord that she was the mother of such a great devotee.

Lord Vithoba—his only interest

In other respects, however, Namdev was the despair of his parents, and later, of his wife and other relatives. From the beginning he had no interest in worldly affairs; he neglected studies in school; he would not take interest in his father's profession as a tailor, or in any other trade. His sole interest was to spend day and night in devotion to Vithoba. His parents were getting old; the family prosperity was waning. Therefore, their dearest wish was that Namdev, while devoting a reasonable spare time to his devotions, should help in maintaining the family in comfort. So, Namdev was sent to the bazaar one day to sell a few pieces of clothes. But Namdev was innocent of the tricks of the trade. To him, such things as prices, and money and its value, were unknown subjects. He went to the bazaar with the clothes, because his father forced him. He sat there on a stone doing Bhajan, entirely forgetting that he had gone there to sell the clothes. After a few hours the sun set and it was time for him to go to the temple for the evening devotional performance. Then only he remembered that he had not sold the clothes and that he would get a thrashing from his father. He was impatient to go to the temple. He therefore sold all the clothes to the very stone on which he was seated, i.e., he kept the clothes on the stone, appointed another stone as a guarantee that the first one would pay the money the next day, and went to the temple.

Namdev's father was furious on hearing his son's adventures and asked him to bring forth Dhondya (which means a stone and which is also used as a proper name among certain classes of people of Maharashtra) who had guaranteed the money. The next day Namdev went back to the bazaar, found that the clothes had vanished during the night and took the second stone (Dhondya) home, as it refused to pay the money, and locked it in a room. He then went to the temple and narrated all the events to Vithoba and explained his difficulties also. When Namdev's father asked him to show him Dhondya who had guaranteed the money, Namdev replied that Dhondya had been kept in a closed room in the house and ran to the temple. When the father opened the room to demand the money, he found, to his surprise, a lump of gold. Great was the father's joy; but Namdev was quite indifferent to it. He only praised God for saving him from a thrashing. Thus it went on.

His marriage

In the meantime, Namdev married Radha Bai. Radha Bai was a worldly-minded woman. In response to Namdev's invitation, Vittal attended the naming ceremony of Namdev's child in the guise of a human being, named the child 'Narayana' and gave good gifts on the occasion.

There was extreme poverty in the house of Namdev. Namdev neglected his worldly duties. Namdev's mother and wife abused Lord Krishna. Under the guise of Dharma Setti of Vaikunthapuram and the pretence of past friendship with Namdev, the Lord visited Namdev's house, gave magnificent gifts to Radha Bai and disappeared.

A Bhakta, named Parisha Bhagavat, propitiated Rukmini and got the philosopher's stone which could convert iron into gold. Parisha's wife gave the stone to her friend Radha Bai one day.. Radha Bai showed the stone to her husband and said that his Bhakti was of no use and was inferior to the Bhakti of Parisha Bhagavat. Namdev threw the stone into the river. Next day Parisha came to know of everything and took Namdev to task. Namdev showed Parisha the place where he had dropped the stone. Parisha searched for the stone and found, not a single stone, but a whole lot. Parisha was struck with wonder. He admired the spirit of renunciation and the spiritual powers of Namdev.

Namdev felt it increasingly difficult to take interest in household affairs and in his parents, wife and children; and no amount of persuasion from all those people or his friends was successful in bringing him back to the worldly life. To him there was only one interest and that was Lord Vithoba. He used to spend hour after hour sitting before Vithoba, talking to Him, discussing spiritual matters with Him and doing Bhajan. To Namdev, Vithoba was the beginning and the end of everything.

Meeting with Jnanadev

When Namdev was about twenty years of age, he met the great saint Jnanadev at Pandharpur. Jnanadev was naturally attracted to Namdev as a great devotee of Vithoba. That he might benefit from the company of Namdev, he persuaded Namdev to go with him to all the holy places on pilgrimage. Namdev did not want to go, as that would mean separation from Lord Vithoba of Pandharpur. However, wiser counsel prevailed and Namdev was induced to go on pilgrimage. This was the most important period in the life of Namdev. Practically from this time, the two great saints almost never separated till death parted them. The pilgrimage extended to all parts of India and almost all the holy places.

On the way, several miracles are reported to have been performed by both Namdev and Jnanadev. Once Namdev and Jnanadev reached the desert of Marwar. Namdev was dying of thirst. They found out a well, but the water was at such a low depth that it was impossible to get it by ordinary means. Jnanadev proposed to assume the form of a bird by his Laghima Siddhi and bring the water up in his beak. But Namdev proved superior to him. He prayed to Rukmini. The level of the water rose miraculously to the surface. The well is seen even today at Kaladji, ten miles off Bikaner.

Namdev and Jnanadev came to Naganathpuri. Namdev started Bhajan in the temple. There was a huge crowd. The temple priests were not able to enter the temple and so became angry. Namdev went to the western gate of the temple and spent the night in doing Kirtan. The image of the temple itself turned to his side.

A Brahmin of Bidar invited Namdev to do Bhajan in his house. Namdev went there with a large number of devotees. The Sultan mistook them for rebel troops and sent General Kasi Pant against them. The general reported to the Sultan that it was only a religious party. The Sultan ordered that Namdev should be arrested and prosecuted. He asked Namdev to rouse a butchered cow to life or embrace Islam. An elephant was sent to crush Namdev to death. Namdev's mother requested her son to embrace Islam to save his life. But Namdev was prepared to die. Namdev raised the dead cow to life. The Sultan and others were struck with amazement. Namdev won the admiration of the Sultan and his party.

Namdev and Jnanadev met Narsi Mehta at Junagarh; Kabir, Kamal and Mudgalacharya at Kashi; Tulsidas at Chitrakut; Pipaji at Ayodhya; Nanak at a place in the Deccan; and Dadu, Gorakhnath and Matsyendranath in other places.

When feeding of Brahmins was done by Namdev at the end of his pilgrimage, Vittal and Rukmini became the cooks and servers. They ate out of the very plate which Namdev used.

Namdev gained much, during the pilgrimage, from the society of Jnaneshwar and from Nivritti who was Jnaneshwar's elder brother and Guru, and was able to look on this world with a wider vision as the manifestation of God.

As we saw earlier, Namdev's world began and ended with the Deity 'Vithoba' of Pandharpur and he would not recognize any other Deity as the symbol of God. The pilgrimage lasted about five years and during this period Jnanadev advised Namdev to adopt a Guru so that he might be in a position to realise completely the manifestation of the all-pervading God and thus fulfil his own mission in life. Again Namdev hesitated as he thought that such action might alienate his loyalty and devotion to Vithoba. He plainly said that as long as he had the love of Vithoba, he had nothing to desire except constant devotion to Him. In fact, Vithoba was his Guru. It was, however, clear to Jnanadev and other saints in the company that Namdev's view was rather narrow in the sense that he thought God was centred in the Deity of Vithoba of Pandharpur and they wanted him to acquire the wider vision which they themselves had attained.

One day, in such company, Gora, another saint and a potter by trade, was asked to ascertain which of them were half-baked, i.e., had not realised Brahman. Gora took a small, flat wooden board such as he used to prepare or test the pots and began to pat on the head of everybody. When he came to Namdev and patted on his head, Namdev cried aloud thinking he was hurt. Immediately, all the others in the company began to laugh saying that Namdev was only half-baked and had not become fixed in his spiritual position.

Adopting a Guru

Greatly mortified, Namdev repaired to Vithoba and complained to Him of his humiliation. He said that he saw no necessity for him to have a Guru as he had intimate relationship with Lord Krishna Himself. Lord Krishna said that Namdev did not really know Him. Namdev denied this. Lord Krishna challenged Namdev and asked him to find out His identity that day. Namdev agreed. Lord Krishna took the form of a Pathan horseman and passed before Namdev. Namdev could not recognize the Lord. Namdev agreed to go to a Guru. Lord Vithoba then advised him to adopt Visoba Khechar as his Guru.

Visoba Khechar was one of the disciples of Jnanadev and was living at the time at a village called Avandhya. Namdev proceeded to the village immediately and arrived there at about noon. He took shelter in a temple in order to take some rest. There in that temple he saw a man sleeping with his feet on the Deity Itself. Namdev was shocked, woke up the man and rebuked him for this sacrilege. The man was no other than Visoba himself. Visoba replied, "O Namdev, why did you wake me up? Is there a single spot in this world which is not permeated by God? If you think that such a spot can be found, kindly place my feet there". Namdev took the feet of Visoba in his hands and moved them to another direction, but the Deity was there. He then moved Visoba in still another direction, but the Deity was there too! Namdev could not find any direction or spot where he could place the feet of Visoba without treading on the Deity. God was everywhere. Having realised this great truth that God had permeated the whole universe, Namdev surrendered himself to Visoba gratefully and humbly. Visoba then advised Namdev at great length. A small portion of Visoba's advice is given below.

"If you want to be absolutely happy, fill this world with Bhajan and the sacred Name of the Lord. The Lord is the world itself. Give up all ambitions or desires. Let them take care of themselves. Be content only with the name of Vittal. You need not undergo any hardship or penance in order to go to heaven. Vaikuntha will come to you of itself. Do not be anxious of this life or of your friends or relatives. They are like the illusions of a mirage. One has to spend a short space of time here like the potter's wheel which goes on rotating even after the potter has left. Make the best of it by keeping the name of Vittal ever in your mind and on your lips and by recognizing Him everywhere and in everyone. This is my experience of life.

"Pandharpur was established on the banks of the river Chandrabhaga as a sort of boat for people to cross safely this ocean of life. Pandharinath is standing there as the boatman-in-charge to take you to the other side; and the most important point is that He does this without asking for any fee. In this way He has saved crores of people who have gone to Him in surrender. If you surrender to Him, there is no death in this world."

After initiation by Visoba, Namdev became more philosophical and large-hearted. His temple was no longer the small narrow space on the banks of the Chandrabhaga, but the whole world. His God was not Vithoba or Vittal with hands and legs, but the omnipotent infinite Being.

A few days after Namdev had adopted Visoba as his Guru, he was sitting at a place doing his Bhajan. In the meantime, a dog came to the spot and ran away with the bread he had prepared for his midday meal. Namdev ran after the dog—not with a stick in his hand, but with a cup of Ghee; and he addressed the dog thus: "O Lord of the world! Why do You want to eat the dry bread? Take some Ghee along with it. It will taste much better". Namdev's realisation of Atma was now complete and overflowing.

After Namdev had returned with Jnanadev from the long pilgrimage, the latter expressed his desire to take Samadhi at Alandi. Namdev therefore accompanied the party to Alandi as he could not part with Jnanadev. He was with Jnanadev to the last moment. He then accompanied the party until the other brothers, Nivritti and Sopan, and their sister Muktabai, left the world. Namdev has left behind a detailed account of the ends of these four saints in beautiful poems. Namdev was so shocked by these events which occurred within a short space of one year that he himself was left with no desire to live in this world. He took his Samadhi at Pandharpur at the age of twenty-six in 1295 A.D.

Namdev was not an author of any big treatise; but he left behind him a large number of Abhangas or short poems, full with the nectar of Bhakti and love towards God. These are exceedingly sweet. Most of these are lost, but there are extant about four thousand Abhangas, which to this day are a great source of inspiration to all who would read them. Some of the Abhangas are found in the Sikh *Adi Granth.*

The essence of Namdev's message is: "Always recite the Name of the Lord. Constantly remember Him. Hear His glory. Meditate on the Lord in your heart. Serve the Lord with your hands. Place your head at His lotus feet. Do Kirtan. You will forget your hunger and thirst. The Lord will be near you. You will attain immortality and eternal bliss".

Namdev's maid-servant Janabai

No account of the life of Namdev would be complete without a mention of Janabai. She was a maid-servant in the household of Namdev. Nothing is known of her life except that she was Namdev's maid-servant. She herself forgot sometimes that she had an existence apart from being the maid-servant of Namdev. In several poems on devotion which she has left behind, she describes herself as 'Nam's maid-servant' or 'Namdev's Jani'. She was one of the closest followers of Namdev and had no ambition other than to serve Namdev and sing the praises of the Lord Vithoba. For instance, in one of her poems she sings:

"Let me undergo as many births in this world as You please, but grant that my desires are fulfilled. They are that I see Pandharpur and serve Namdev in every birth. I do not mind if I am a bird or a swine, a dog or a cat, but my conditions are that in each of these lives, I must see Pandharpur and serve Namdev. This is the ambition of Namdev's maid."

In another place, Janabai writes:

"Give me only this gift, O Hari, that I shall always sing Your sacred Name. Fulfil my only desire that You will accept my humble homage and service. This is all that I desire. Have mercy on me and fulfil my desires. I want to concentrate my eyes and mind on You and have Your Name on my lips. For this the maid Jani falls at Your feet."

That sums up the philosophy of Janabai and how she attained her desired goal. So intense and sincere was her devotion to Vithoba that the Lord Himself used to lighten her household duties, which, as she became old, she found unable to perform. By her service and devotion to God, she completely succeeded in effacing herself and she got completely merged in Him. A great soul—Janabai! And a greater Master—Namdev!

EKANATH

Ekanath is a well-known saint of Maharashtra. He was born of Suryanarayana and Rukmini in the year 1533 A.D. at Paithan in Maharashtra. The fire of devotion was kindled in his heart even when he was a boy of ten years. This was all due to his previous Samskaras. The Gita says: "There he regains the understanding acquired in his former body and strives still further for perfection". (Ch. VI-43).

Once Ekanath heard an Akasa Vani, a voice from the sky, which said: "See Janardana Panth at Devagiri. He will put you in the proper spiritual path and guide you".

Ekanath immediately proceeded to Devagiri, met Janardana Panth and prostrated at his feet. Janardana accepted Ekanath as his disciple. Janardana was the Dewan of the province of Devagiri. Ekanath lived with his Guru for eight years and served him heart and soul.

One day Janardana asked Ekanath to find out a mistake of one pie in the account book. Ekanath sat the whole night to detect the error. He laboured very hard and at last found it out just before daybreak. Ekanath was extremely glad. He informed his Guru that he had found out the error. Janardana replied, "You had to concentrate so much to detect a small error in the accounts. Then how much more concentration will you need to find out God? You rejoice now when you have found out a small mistake in the account. How much happy would you be if you find out the mistakes in your life's account?". Ekanath learnt a good lesson and spent much of his time in deep meditation and self-analysis.

In those days when there was no railway communication, Ekanath went on foot on a pilgrimage to Gangotri. He stocked water from the source of the Ganges in vessels and carried them in a *Kavadi* of bamboos on his shoulder. He then went to Varanasi and performed Puja-Abhishekam of one vessel of Gangotri water to Kashi Viswanath. He proceeded thence to

Rameswaram to do Abhishekam there to Ramalingeswar. On the way, a few miles before Rameswaram, Ekanath saw an emaciated, diseased ass which was dying of thirst. As the sun was very scorching, Ekanath thought that God wanted to test him. Ekanath was a saint of Para Bhakti. He saw and felt God in everything, in every moment, and in every action. He thought that this was the best opportunity to serve Ramalingeswar in the ass. He never took that being for an ass. He forgot the Nama-Rupa. He saw the essence, Satchidananda, Asti-Bhati-Priya, in the ass. He remembered the words of Lord Krishna to Uddhava: "See Me in everything. Make prostration to asses, etc." Ekanath never grieved a bit that he had lost the chance of serving Ramalingeswar. He said: "This is the best opportunity. This tantamounts to the feeding of one lakh Brahmins". He broke the lid of the vessel and gave the ass all the water to drink.

God is everywhere, in every being. The water given to the ass, when it needed it most, had already reached Lord Ramalingeswar. Then and there Ekanath had Darshan of Ramalingeswar.

Ekanath obeyed the orders of his Guru and entered the life of a householder. He married Girija Bai, an ideal chaste lady.

Anger was unknown to Ekanath. Some of the mischievous people of the village wherein Ekanath was living wanted to excite him one way or the other. The villagers bribed a Mohammedan and asked him to excite Ekanath in some manner. The Mohammedan agreed. He went to the bank of the river and waited at the place where Ekanath used to take his bath. When Ekanath came after his bath, the Mohammedan spat on his face. Ekanath did not speak a word, simply laughed, and went again to take another bath. When he came up, the Mohammedan again spat on him. Ekanath smiled and went for another bath. This process went on a hundred and eight times. Ekanath was not at all affected. He was an embodiment of patience itself. When the Mohammedan found that Ekanath was absolutely serene, he thought within himself: "Ekanath is not a man. He is a god". The Mohammedan was very much afraid. He thought that Ekanath would curse him to death. He trembled and prostrated before Ekanath and begged his pardon. Then the Mohammedan narrated the whole story and revealed to Ekanath that he had been bribed by the villagers to excite him.

At another time, the villagers bribed a poor Brahmin and induced him to excite Ekanath. The Brahmin thought within himself: "Which will be the better way to excite Ekanath? Let me catch hold of his wife. This will surely irritate him. I will succeed in my attempt. This is the best method". So he decided to make his experiment. One day when Ekanath's wife was serving food, this mischievous Brahmin entered Ekanath's house and caught hold of his wife. Ekanath stood as a solid rock. He laughed heartily. What is this to a man who has no identification with the body, wife and other things! What is this to a man who has crossed the ocean of ignorance! What is this for a man full of Sattva! In this situation he told his wife: "Girija Devi! The child has caught hold of you. It is very hungry. Give it milk profusely". When the poor Brahmin noticed that Ekanath was not a bit moved and when he heard these sympathetic words, his heart melted. He broke down into tears. He repented that he had done a heinous crime. He prostrated before Ekanath and said, "Maharaj, forgive me. I have done a foolish act. I am a poor man. I have no money for my maintenance. These villagers bribed me to do this act, to make you angry. As I am poor, I was naturally attracted by this offer of money. I have committed a capital sin. Pardon me". Ekanath excused and forgave the poor, ignorant Brahmin. He pitied him and sympathized with him. He asked him to study the Bhagavata and to repeat the Mantra of Lord Krishna. He gave him a Tulsi Mala also.

The villagers had been certain that this time they would succeed in their plans. So, when they saw the poor Brahmin returning with a Tulsi Mala round his neck, they were quite disappointed. The Brahmin told them: "I did my best. I caught hold of his wife. This did not, in the least, affect him. He was smiling all the while. He is a god. Now I am his disciple. He has given me Mantra. From that moment, I have left all my mischievous acts. I am now trying my best to have Darshan of Lord Krishna. Hereafter, I will not join with you all".

Ekanath had great love for the untouchables. He had equal vision. He saw Lord Krishna only in all creatures. Once, some Mahars, who were passing by the house of Ekanath, stopped in front of his house as they were attracted by the sweet smell of palatable dishes which were being prepared for the death anniversary of Ekanath's father. Ekanath at once invited them and fed them sumptuously. He got food prepared again and invited the Brahmins. The Brahmins were offended. They said, "O Ekanath, you fed the Mahars first. We will not take food at your home". Ekanath then invoked his forefathers directly through his power of devotion and fed them in person.

Ekanath was a great devotee. Lord Krishna Himself assumed the form of a poor Brahmin boy, and under the name of Kandia, lived as a water-carrier in the house of Ekanath for a period of twelve years rendering such service as bringing water for the Puja, making sandal-paste for worship, removing the leaves after dinner, etc. After this period, Kandia disappeared miraculously.

Ekanath wrote the *Bhagavat*, which holds the same place of respect in Maharashtra as Tulsidas' *Ramayan* holds in Northern India. It is popularly known as *Ekanath Bhagavatam* and is found in every house in Maharashtra.

At the age of sixty-six, in the year 1599 A.D., Ekanath passed away. A staunch Bhakta, a great Bhagavata, an ideal householder and a great saint, he still shines as a model for all people.

TUKARAM

Tukaram was born in 1608 A.D. at a village called Dehu in Pune district. It is about seven miles from Alandi—the place honoured by the Samadhi of Jnaneshwar—and about three miles from the railway station at Shelarwadi on the railway line running from Bombay to Pune. Tukaram came of a well-to-do Sudra family belonging to the tradesman class called Moray. The family had established itself at Dehu for a long time. They had accepted Vithoba of Pandharpur for worship and they had also constructed a temple of their own dedicated to Vithoba. The family members, since many generations, had also accepted the 'Wari' of Pandharpur, i.e., the annual pilgrimages to Pandharpur on the eleventh day of the month of Ashadh (June-July) and again on the eleventh day of the month of Kartik (October-November). The childhood of Tukaram was almost uneventful.

Tukaram was the second of three brothers, the names of the other two being Savji and Kanhoba. Savji had no worldly ambitions and the father was religiously inclined and thus the family burden fell on Tukaram when he was just thirteen years old. Tukaram was married to Rukmabai at about the same time, but as she was of weak health, he was soon married again to Jijabai of Pune. Tukaram began the management of household affairs and carried it on to the satisfaction of everybody, till he was about twenty years of age. In 1625, when he was about seventeen years, he lost his parents, and as his sister-in-law also died about this time, his elder brother left the village and went to Varanasi seeking spiritual salvation. The death of his parents was a great shock to Tukaram. And the next four years, from 1626 to 1630, were almost cyclonic in their effect.

After the death of his parents and his sister-in-law, and the going away of his elder brother Savji, all enthusiasm for worldly life left Tukaram. Taking advantage of his state of mind, the debtors would not repay whatever was due to him and the creditors began to press him for the money due to them. Tukaram tried his hand in several ventures of trade and always came back either with empty hands or with a loss. Once, on the way home, he was robbed of everything by confidence-tricksters who gave him gilt brass ornaments in exchange for all the money he had with him. On another occasion, returning home, he came across a poor Brahmin who was starving; he made the Brahmin very happy by giving him everything—the profit as well as the principal which his wife had borrowed. After those bitter experiences, Tukaram was not entrusted with anything valuable when he went far from home. Jijabai helped him again to set up a small shop in his own village; but she counted without Tukaram's state of mind. Tukaram used to sit in the shop doing Bhajan and being very kind and honest to his customers. Soon, therefore, he became bankrupt, with two wives, a son and a younger brother to feed. Just at this juncture, about the years 1629 and 1630, the country was visited by a very severe famine for two consecutive years. Tukaram's first wife died of hunger crying for food. Tukaram's son also died. The few cattle that were left also died. The promissory notes of monies due to the family became dead letters of credit as nothing could be realised in a famine. Tukaram's real mission in life began at this stage.

As a consequence of the many misfortunes, Tukaram was so much disgusted with life that he left his house and village and disappeared into the Bhamnath forest nearby. For fifteen days he stayed there concentrating on the Almighty without food, water or sleep. After the fifteenth day, he realised his Supreme Self and Vithoba visited him in His true form.

In the meantime, Tukaram's second wife was searching everywhere for her husband and when she found him at the hill, she brought him back to the house; but it was a Tukaram different from the one who had left her a fortnight earlier. Now Tukaram had no love for his household, wife or relations. Immediately after he came back, he gathered all the promissory notes which were in the house, and all the account books, and threw them into the Indrayani river, in spite of the protests of his relatives. Then, with his own hands, he reconstructed the temple which had fallen into disrepair and began to spend his life—day and night—in Bhajan and Kirtan. His mind at that time was described by him thus: "O God! Kindly grant that I should never forget You. My body is made up of the five elements which I have borrowed for the duration of my life and which I have to return with interest at the end. My conclusion is that there is no well-wisher for me other than You, O Panduranga!".

As a result of his whole-hearted devotion, Bhajan and Kirtan, Tukaram was rewarded with Guru Upadesh. The Guru visited him in a dream. Tukaram describes this, the greatest event of his life, thus: "The Sadguru came to me in a dream and was really very kind to me, though I had done nothing to deserve it. He met me when I was going to the river for a bath and placed his hand on my head and blessed me. He said that his name was Babaji and gave the names of his two predecessors as Raghava Chaitanya and Keshava Chaitanya and advised me to do Japa of *Ramakrishna Hari*. I adopted my Guru on the tenth day of the bright half of the month Magh". This was about the month of January 1632 when he was twenty-four years of age. Tukaram's joy at this event knew no bounds.

Tukaram now began to spend his life more and more in devotional practices, study of the poems and works of Jnanadev, Namdev and Ekanath, Gita, Bhagavata, etc., with the result that slowly, but unconsciously, he began to make poems. Then one day, he had a dream in which Namdev appeared with Pandurang, woke him and advised him to make devotional songs. They would not hear of any excuses. Pandurang gave him the necessary inspiration and Namdev told him to complete the one hundred crores of poems which he had intended to make and of which he had completed ninety-four crores and forty lakhs, leaving a balance of five crores and sixty lakhs for Tukaram. The divine art of making poems came naturally to Tukaram and as they were of the nature of Bhakti, the people began to be more and more attracted to Tukaram—more so as he did not seek anything materially for himself or for his own worldly welfare.

Whenever Tukaram began to perform Bhajan or Kirtan, people began to flock to the place, and with very few exceptions, people of all classes began to consider him as a saint and treat him with respect. This was of course resented by a small number of people and they tried their best to discredit him; and having failed in this, they sent a report against Tukaram to Rameshwar Shastri who was regarded as a learned Brahmin of the time.

Tukaram tried to convince the Shastri that he was a very innocent person. But Rameshwar was adamant and would not listen to any argument. He told Tukaram finally that he saw, in the poems of Tukaram, a deliberate attempt to explain the principles of the Srutis which Tukaram, as a Sudra by caste, had no right to do; he must therefore stop making poems of that sort in future, and as for the poems he had already made, they should be drowned in the Indrayani river. Tukaram held all Brahmins in great reverence, and therefore, he immediately brought out of his home all the poems, bound them together, tied a big stone round the bundle, and threw it into the river. Tukaram's traducers, who were jealous of him, were greatly pleased. Tukaram did not mind their taunts, but he was worried. Here he was, merely singing the praise of God in his poems, and that was not the monopoly only of the Vedas and the Srutis. Moreover, he had been commanded by Panduranga Himself to spread Bhakti among the people through the poems.

Tukaram then sat on the bank of the river Indrayani in constant prayer to Pandurang to show him the correct path. For thirteen days he thus sat unmoved, without water, food or sleep. On the last day, one of Tukaram's followers, in a dream, saw Pandurang coming to him and telling him, "Go to the river; there you will find the poems of Tukaram floating on the surface intact". At once the man went to the river and brought to the bank the bundle of poems. Tukaram was moved by the mercy of God and delivered five poems blaming himself for doubting the word of God and for putting Him to so much trouble of having to preserve the poems in water for thirteen days. This, however, was not sufficient for Tukaram who always held the word of a Brahmin as worthy of respect as that of the holy scriptures and he had the orders of Rameshwar Shastri not to make poems any more.

Soon after this event, Rameshwar one day passed through the village of Vagholi and came to a village where a Muslim Fakir by name Anagadshah was staying. In Anagadshah's compound, there was a big fountain throwing cool water all round. Rameshwar, seeing that fountain, was tempted to take a bath in the waters. Anagadshah was annoyed to see a stranger trespassing into his compound and cursed him that all his body should feel a burning sensation inwardly. Immediately Rameshwar began to suffer from the effects of the curse. All his efforts to make his body cool failed, and in despair, unable to bear the pangs, he went to Alandi and sat before the Samadhi of Jnaneshwar and prayed to him to relieve him of the burning sensation in his body. At night he saw Jnaneshwar in a dream. Jnaneshwar addressed him: "You entertain hatred in your mind towards Tukaram, who is the greatest devotee of Vithoba. Go and surrender to Tukaram; all your bodily pains will vanish". Rameshwar, however, was afraid to go in person to Tukaram. He knew by that time all that had taken place at Dehu and he had come to recognize the greatness of Tukaram and therefore was afraid that Tukaram might curse him. So he sent a letter to Tukaram apologizing and asking for forgiveness. Tukaram had nothing but supreme love towards everybody, towards even his persecutors. On receiving the letter, he sent a reply to Rameshwar in the following verse:

"If the mind is pure, even your enemies become your friends; you have no danger from cruel animals like tigers or serpents. Even poison becomes as beneficial to you as the nectar of heaven. All unhappiness will be converted into happiness and even suffering due to the burning of the body will vanish. You will come to love all creatures as you love yourself; you will entertain equal vision towards all. Tuka says, 'Narayan has showered His mercy on me. That is why I feel like this towards all beings'."

As Rameshwar read the reply and came to the words, "and even suffering due to the burning of the body will vanish", his body became free of all suffering and thus it was firmly impressed on him that he had done great injustice to Tukaram. From that time Rameshwar became a great admirer and an ardent follower of Tukaram.

By this incident, Tukaram's name and fame spread far and wide; but he himself remained poor. He was always doing Bhajan and Kirtan and he earned nothing. The burden of maintaining the family consisting of himself, wife and children fell on his poor wife. Tukaram was so absorbed in his Bhajan that generally he forgot about his dinner. His wife had to take his food, search for him and serve him wherever he was to be found. Mostly he was found on the Bhamgiri hill. Tukaram's wife had to undergo many difficulties in maintaining the family; but she was a good woman though she was apt to lose her temper sometimes. Before his death, Tukaram himself acknowledged her devotion and purity.

One of Tukaram's admirers promised him some grain every day if he would look after his fields of corn and protect them from birds. Tukaram agreed as he thought that he would find a solitary place to sing the praises of God. When Tukaram went to the field, all the birds flew away. And Tukaram was so upset that the poor birds were deprived of their food. In a few days, however, the birds lost their shyness and fear and began to feed regularly on the corn. When the owner of the fields came to know of it, he hauled up Tukaram before the village headman; and in spite of all the protests of Tukaram about kindness to God's creatures and duty to allow them to feed freely, he was made to give a promissory note to the owner of the fields for whatever sum might be found to be the loss. After the harvest, however, it was found that the farmer, instead of losing, had got double the expected quantity. The farmer was so overjoyed that he sent Tukaram the excess quantity which, as was to be expected, Tukaram distributed to the poor.

The great Maharashtra chief Shivaji was a great admirer of Tukaram and sent him a large number of costly presents and also invited him to his court. Tukaram refused both the presents and the invitation, saying that he had nothing to do with earthly kings. Then Shivaji himself came to Tukaram and stayed with him for several days and pressed him to accept some presents which Tukaram steadily refused. One day, Shivaji was so much impressed and moved by the praises, songs and Bhajan of Tukaram that he, for the moment, wanted to give up his kingdom and take to Bhajan and follow Tukaram. But Tukaram dissuaded him from doing so. He reminded Shivaji of his duty to his subjects, to Hindu religion and to Dharma and finally advised him thus: "In order to realise God, it is not necessary to give up food or water and go to a forest. If the worldly pleasures come to you of themselves, enjoy them by all means, but only in the name of God who dwells in all of us. Do not desire anything and do not give up anything. This is my simple and only advice to you". Shivaji returned to his court a happier and a more contented man.

One day, a Brahmin wanted to read saint Mukund Raj's book *Viveka Sindhu* with Tukaram, so as to get the benefit of Tukaram's explanation, advice, etc., and thereby obtain Self-realisation and oneness with Brahman. Tukaram agreed. The Brahmin went on reading and Tukaram closed his eyes and went on doing his own Japa with concentration. After an hour or two, the Brahmin was annoyed at Tukaram's indifference and told him so bitterly. Tukaram, without losing temper in the least, told the Brahmin thus in a poem: "It is just for this reason that I go to the forests leaving behind the house and these things. I want to avoid oneness with God. I do not want to lose my love towards the image of God. If I obtain Self-realisation, all my desire for doing Bhajan, Kirtan etc., will vanish. I do not wish this to happen. I do not wish to hear the voice advocating Advaitism". On another occasion, Tukaram sang, "I want this relation to be firmly fixed between us, viz., 'You, the Master; I, the servant. You, on the high pedestal; I, at Your feet'. Give me, O Lord, only this gift—that I shall never forget Thee, that I shall always sing Your praises with affection".

Tukaram always advocated Saguna Bhakti in the form of repeating His Name and in the form of Bhajan, singing His praises. He said that Bhakti was the higher form of devotion and service, and was even higher than Mukti. He spent many, many days and nights doing Bhajan. He used to get invitations from nearby villages to go over there and do Bhajan with the villagers. Once, he was performing Kirtan at Lohagaon, a village near Dehu, and there was a large concourse of people doing Bhajan with him. Among them was a Brahmin named Joshi who had come to the Bhajan leaving his only dying child with its mother. The child died and the mother became very miserable. She came to where Tukaram was sitting in the Bhajan and upbraided him that he was the cause of making her husband indifferent to the dying child and thus responsible for the child's death. Tukaram immediately began to pray to God to grant life to the child. He sang an extempore song in the most earnest and moving terms possible in which the whole audience joined with the most heartfelt devotion. Lord Pandarinath granted their prayer and the child came to life and joined in the Bhajan.

Many wonderful events are said to have occurred in Tukaram's life. His fame spread throughout the land; but he himself remained unaffected by all that. He knew the exact time when he would depart from this world. He grew weary of living and thought his time was being wasted in attending to the wants of the body when it should have been better utilized in Kirtan, Bhajan and praise of Vithoba. He prayed to the Lord that he might be taken away soon to His lotus feet where he could remain worshipping Him continuously for ever and anon. When Tukaram's end was near, he told his friends that he would be going away in a few days. The night before his departure, Tukaram performed a Kirtan which was memorable in many respects. The subject was Harikatha. Tukaram said, "Harikatha is like the union of three holy rivers—God, the devotee and His Name. By listening to it, all one's sins are burnt off and one is purified. Even the pebbles lying around become holy and fit to be worshipped. Those among you who wish to be fit for heaven should take the holy Prasad. This is the easiest way to attain heaven". The next morning Tukaram said to his wife, "You will soon get a son called 'Narayan' and he will make you happy. You made my days happy. I shall never be able to repay your kindness". On hearing that his death was nearing, the people of the whole village assembled round him and he exhorted them thus:

"Though you all bear the responsibilities of family life, never forget Pandurang. Never forget to worship Him and sing His praises. Pandharpur is very near you. It is the Vaikuntha on this earth. Go and worship the Lord there. It is my experience that the Name of the Lord alone will save you at the time of death. All of you have protected and maintained me in your midst for such a long time. I can never repay you and I am very grateful to you. I shall ever pray to Vithoba to bless you all and take you all to heaven after this life. This is my goodbye to you all and this is my advice to you. I prostrate before you and beseech you with tears never to forget the Name of the Lord. Always do Kirtan and Bhajan of Lord Narayana. Do not be anxious about your material welfare. The Lord will look to it. This is all ephemeral. The Lord's Name is eternal. Depend on it only. Ever sing the praises of the Lord. Do Japa of *Ramakrishna Hari* and He will always save you. This is my last request and advice to you."

Thus passed away one of the great saints of Maharashtra with God's Name on his lips, singing praises of Him. Tukaram left this world in the year 1649 when he was forty-one years old. It is believed that Lord Vishnu sent His own chariot and servants to take Tukaram to His abode.

DAMAJI

Damaji was a great devotee of Lord Panduranga of Pandharpur. He flourished in the thirteenth century. He was the Dewan of Mangalvedya, in the kingdom of Bedar, Golkonda.

Once a severe famine hit the people. Damaji opened the royal granaries and distributed the corn to all the poor, without the Nawab's permission, and saved millions of people from starvation.

The jealous manager reported to the Nawab that Damaji had distributed all the corn to the poor without his permission. The Nawab became angry and ordered the commander to arrest Damaji and bring him to his presence. While Damaji was being taken to the capital of the Nawab, he asked the Nawab's men to take him through Pandharpur, so that he might have the last Darshan of Vittala. The Nawab's men agreed to Damaji's request.

To save his devotee, the Lord now took the form of a Mahar. He appeared at the Nawab's Durbar in a black blanket and with a stick in hand. The Nawab questioned the intruder, "Who are you?". To which the intruder replied, "My name is Vittu. I am a Mahar. I am a servant of Dewan Damaji. My master distributed all the grain from Your Majesty's stores to the poor people who were suffering from starvation during the severe famine. But he has sent me with the price of the grain so distributed by him. Please receive the money and let me have a receipt for the same". The Nawab said, "Take the money to the treasury and I will sign the receipt".

The Nawab was very much attracted by the charming personality of Vittu. Vittu went to the treasury. The treasurer emptied the money bag of Vittu into the money box. The bag was again seen refilled with money. This occurred several times until the whole amount due from Damaji was paid into the treasury. The treasurer was struck with wonder. Vittu obtained the receipt and came back to the Nawab. The Nawab signed the receipt and handed it over to Vittu. It was written in the receipt: "Received in full the price of the grain of my stores at Mangalvedya".

There was so much lustre and attraction in the servant of Damaji that the Nawab thought that the man must be a divine being. The Nawab became quite restless. He desired to see Vittu again. He cried, "Vittu, Vittu, where are you Vittu?". He commanded his officers to find out Vittu, but Vittu was nowhere to be found.

The Lord did some more fun also. He took the receipt and kept it in the Gita owned by Damaji. Damaji took his bath in the Chandrabhaga river and wanted to go through the Slokas. To his great astonishment, he saw the receipt of the Nawab. He knew that it was all due to the grace of Vittala.

In the meantime, the Nawab himself went in search of Vittu. He met Damaji on the way. He said to Damaji: "O venerable saint! Pardon me. Forgive me. I did a very heinous sin. Show me your servant Vittu now". Damaji was quite astonished. He said to the Nawab, "My revered master! I have no servant by name Vittu. I do not know who this Vittu is. If Your Majesty can give me some signs of identification, I may find him out". The Nawab replied, "He is the Mahar Vittu, your servant, who brought me the money, the price of the grain. He wore a black blanket and had a stick in his hand. He was of dark complexion with lustrous eyes and charming face".

Damaji thought of the receipt that was placed in his Gita and began to dance in joy. He shed tears profusely and said, "O Lord Vittala! O Panduranga! You acted the part of a Mahar for my sake. Blessed is the Nawab! He had Thy sweet Darshan. Thou art the Supreme Lord of this universe. Why didst Thou take all this trouble for me? The Nawab could do nothing more than take my life. I was quite prepared to meet the worst".

Damaji began to cry, "O Panduranga, O Panduranga!". The Lord once more appeared to bless His devotees, Damaji and the Nawab, and blessed them both. How merciful is the Lord! Glory to Bhagavan Krishna! Radhavallabha, the beloved of Radha! Damaji immediately resigned his post of Dewan and spent the remaining few years of his life at Pandharpur in devotion to Lord Vittala until he became one with Him.

CHOKAMELA

Chokamela was a Harijan saint of Maharashtra who lived at Pandharpur in the days of Sri Ramanuja.

Even from his young days Chokamela was much worried over the problem of the depressed classes, their ways of worship and their relationship with other communities. This problem engaged him so much that he often thought whether or not the so-called depressed could have any salvation, as that community had been treated so contemptuously by the other castes and not allowed even the privilege of worshipping the gods which the others were worshipping. One day Chokamela approached the temple at Pandharpur and was praying to the Lord. At that time some Brahmins took notice of this Panchama near their shrine and began to beat him. Chokamela told them that he would never again come to the shrine. This incident induced Chokamela to leave the place once and for all and go on a pilgrimage to some other places in search of finding a solution to his problem.

Then Chokamela went to Varanasi. While roaming in the streets of Varanasi, he heard that the Katha of Bhakta Kabir Das, the Muslim saint devoted to Sri Ram, was going on in the city. He at once hurried to that spot and with rapt attention started hearing the story. At that time, when he was attending the Katha, the incident of Kabir Das' quarrel with the Harijan saint Rohidas was read out. On hearing that, Chokamela was much inspired and was urged by a desire to visit the place where Rohidas lived and did Puja. On going over there, he met one Radha Vallabh who was a descendant of Rohidas. Inspired by this little hope that Harijans also could have the facility to do Puja and worship, Chokamela moved further to South India to have more experiences. He reached Chidambaram, a holy place of pilgrimage dedicated to Lord Siva. On that day, the Festival of Nandanar, another Harijan saint and a worshipper of Lord Siva took place. To Chokamela's great surprise, he witnessed the festivities which were held in the temple in commemoration of Nandanar. Not even that, he saw the idol of Nandanar being placed in the temple and Puja performed for it. He heard from the public the story of how Nandanar was a Harijan doing cultivation under a Brahmin landlord and how he attained salvation by the grace of Lord Siva in spite of the remonstrances made by the Brahmin caste.

Afterwards Chokamela travelled to Srirangam, another famous pilgrim centre in South India. There he witnessed the performance of the funeral rites of the Harijan Bhakta, Maranar Nambi, by a Brahmin. He witnessed also the festivities of Thiruppan Alwar, one of the Alwar saints of South India who had been a Harijan by birth. Much inspired and with the fullest hopes of attaining salvation, Chokamela returned to Panduranga, after getting the Upadesha Mantra from Sri Ramanuja.

At Pandharpur, Chokamela got married. As he was not allowed to worship in the shrine of Pandharpur, he did Puja in his own house. One day, Panduranga Himself entered the house and took Chokamela along with Him to the interior of the temple at Pandharpur. Panduranga was talking to Chokamela while the doors of the temple were locked. One of the Pundits, opening the doors, found this Panchama alone; the Pundit scolded him much, and joining with other Brahmins, forced Chokamela to leave Pandharpur and to live in a village on the banks of the Bhima river.

In that village, Chokamela was spending his days with his wife, doing Puja to the Lord and observing the Vratas. On one Ekadasi day, the Lord Himself came to Chokamela's house as a guest and dined with him. Thus the Lord continued to visit Chokamela's house every Ekadasi day and dine with him. It so happened that on one Ekadasi day, both the husband and the wife slept very late in the early hours of the morning. And Chokamela rebuked his wife for getting up very late as the preparation for the Lord's meals would be delayed. The words were overheard by one Brahmin who passed by the door. He, not knowing the inner secret of Chokamela's life, took Chokamela's words as an insult to his community and to the Lord Himself and reported the matter to the king. The king sentenced Chokamela to death by the wild bullocks of the forest near Pandharpur. Chokamela was taken to the forest to be left at the mercy of the wild bullocks. By the grace of the Lord, the furious wild bullocks that approached Chokamela, instead of killing him, began to lick his body in affection. In the meanwhile, Chokamela's wife came running to the forest to give up her life along with her husband. To the amazement and wonder of the king's servants, both the husband and the wife remained safe. Realising Chokamela to be a great Mahatma, the king repented for his folly and received Chokamela with all honour and pomp. Then Chokamela returned to his village with his wife.

Again, on another day, the Lord came to Chokamela's house and was dining with him while Chokamela's wife was serving both. At that time, the buttermilk got spilt on the garments of the Lord due to a slip on the part of Chokamela's wife. Chokamela got annoyed at this and asked his wife to be more careful in future. Those words were overheard by another Brahmin who took them to be a great insult not only to his community, but also to the Lord and he rushed inside the house and gave a severe slap on the face of Chokamela. And Chokamela, losing all his teeth, fell on the ground senseless. The Brahmin, after finishing his bath, went to the temple, opened the doors and was about to do Puja. There, to his great wonder, he saw a portion of the Lord's garments soiled by buttermilk and the cheek of the Lord swollen. Terrified at that sight and repenting for his folly in having insulted Chokamela, he fell at the feet of the Lord for forgiveness. Then Panduranga ordered the priest to invite Chokamela to the temple with all pomp and respect and ask him to shampoo the cheek.

The priest, taking with him other Brahmins of the temple, ran to Chokamela's house and entreated Chokamela to go with them to the temple. Chokamela went to the temple and did as the Lord had told the Brahmin. The swollen cheek became all right. Chokamela was highly praised for his intense devotion to Lord Panduranga, and at the request of the Brahmins of Pandharpur, he went and lived at Pandharpur with his wife. Thus, singing the Name of the Lord and developing extreme devotion to the Lord, he attained salvation.

AKALKOT SWAMI

Akalkot Swami was a Jnani. He lived in Akalkot in Maharashtra. In the later period of his life, he became a Jnani of the Brahma-varishtha type, by withdrawing the external consciousness and living in the pure Nirvisesha, Nirguna Brahman of Sankara. He shut out the phenomenal consciousness. He had to be spoon-fed with milk just as a man would be fed in the comatose state. Akalkot Swami used to pass stools unconsciously. People used to clean him. The same was the case with the most famous Kumbakonam Mouni Swami of South India. This Swami lived for twenty-five years in an unconscious state. He was fed all along in an easy-chair.

A poor Brahmin performed Tapas for the sake of getting money for the celebration of his daughter's marriage. He propitiated God Ganesha. Ganesha appeared in his dream and told the poor man to go to Akalkot Swami. Swamiji asked the orthodox Brahmin to collect some bones. The poor Brahmin was very much vexed. But, as he was badly in need of money, he obeyed the words of Swamiji and collected some bones. Swamiji told the Brahmin to take them to his house. The Brahmin was very much disappointed. When he reached the house, he did not take the bones inside the house, but kept them in a corner of the verandah. After three days, he wanted to throw away the bones. When he took the bundle, it was very heavy. He opened it, and found to his astonishment, that it was all gold. The Brahmin said to himself, "I made a serious mistake. I ought to have had great faith in the words of a Jnani. They always make fun with worldly people. I ought to have collected some more bones". Such is the power of greed to fix you up in Samsara. Destroy greed which disturbs peace. Have faith in saints.

GORAKUMBAR

In the days of Bhakta Namdev, there lived at Thodagi, on the banks of the river Chandrabhaga, in Maharashtra, a saint by name Gorakumbar.

Sri Dirkabathar, at the instance of the Lord's orders to disseminate spiritual knowledge through Vairagya, was born in a potter's family and was known as Gorakumbar. He had a brother, Ettranna by name, and both, even when they were young, approached the Guru Veerasegara Dasar of Pandharpur and got themselves initiated in the path of devotion to the Lord. Later on, Gorakumbar married Padmavati, and they all lived together, developing extreme devotion to the Lord. Deeply merged in meditation on the Lord and Nama Smaran, Gorakumbar went on with his daily duties and earned his livelihood from what he obtained through selling pots.

One day, both the brothers were busy in baking the pots. At that time a cat, with her kitten, was roaming above the kiln. And unfortunately, the kitten fell into the baking kiln and was burnt. Having lost her kitten, the cat went circling round the kiln, and finding no other way, went out. This was noticed by Ettranna. Repenting much for his folly and carelessness, Ettranna decided to go on a pilgrimage as a penance for his mistake. He informed his brother and went out on a pilgrimage, leaving his brother and his wife alone at Thodagi.

Giving the hands to work and the heart to the Lord, Gorakumbar daily went on with his work at the potter's wheel. Once, his little babe came crawling towards the running wheel, to reach the father. Padmavati had just gone out of the house. Gorakumbar also did not notice the child coming towards him. The child crawled down and got caught in the wheel and was torn to pieces. Padmavati, on returning, saw the situation. Still, Gorakumbar never noticed anything. With a hue and cry, Padmavati began to weep bitterly and she was forced by sorrow to bring Gorakumbar to his senses. On hearing the loud hue and cry of his wife, Gorakumbar saw his child's body torn to pieces. Padmavati scolded her husband for not having noticed the child's approach. Annoyed at those words, Gorakumbar took up his wheel and was about to throw it at his wife and kill her. At that moment, Padmavati cried aloud, "In the name of our Lord Panduranga, don't touch me hereafter". Those words were enough for Gorakumbar to prevent him from giving expression to his fury and he kept aside the wheel. He collected the broken pieces of the body and carried them to the burning ghat for burning. On return, he resumed his work as usual. But from that day he would neither touch his wife nor approach her nor ask her to do anything for him. Seeing the stern austerity her husband was observing, Padmavati felt much for her foolishness in uttering those words which had completely changed him.

Repenting much for her folly, and impelled by the desire to have issues, Padmavati determined to get her sister Pankajakshi married to Gorakumbar. With this in view, she with the cooperation of her parents, tried to persuade Gorakumbar to marry Pankajakshi. No amount of persuasion was of any use. However, they approached his Guru, Veerasegarar. Veerasegarar asked Gorakumbar to marry the girl. Gorakumbar consented to marry Pankajakshi. When the wedding was over, the father of Pankajakshi came to Gorakumbar and asked him to treat both the wives impartially. Gorakumbar gave his word that he would be impartial to both the wives. Fortunately for Gorakumbar, and to the disappointment of Padmavati, Gorakumbar treated Pankajakshi in the same manner as he had treated Padmavati just before his second marriage. This meant that he did not touch both his wives.

Quite unable to bear such separation, both the sisters began to contrive a plan by which Gorakumbar could be forced to touch them and thus end his aloofness with them. One night, while Gorakumbar was fast asleep, both the sisters approached him and had their beds on either side of him. After a while, they took his hands and kept them on their bodies. On waking, Gorakumbar saw that his hands were placed on the bodies of his wives on either side. Feeling it a gross and heinous crime on his part, without any hesitation he got up from his bed, took the knife and cut away both his hands. At that critical juncture, Panduranga Himself, knowing the situation in which Gorakumbar had been placed, took the guise of Ettranna, his brother, and came to the house of Gorakumbar as if returning from his pilgrimage. Unable to bear the horrible scene, he ran to the spot and consoled his brother and both the wives who were more perplexed than ever before and were overwhelmed with extreme sorrow. From that day the Lord in the guise of Ettranna began to serve Gorakumbar in such a way that he might never once feel for the loss of his hands or feel a need to break his oath.

Bhakta Namdev went to worship the Lord in the temple. He could not see Lord Panduranga in the shrine. After deep meditation, he found out that the Lord was in the house of Gorakumbar in the guise of Ettranna. As the festival at Pandharpur was fast approaching, Namdev went to Gorakumbar's house with his retinue of followers to call back the Lord to seat Himself in the shrine during the festive occasion. On arriving at Gorakumbar's house, Namdev made prostrations at the feet of Gorakumbar and the Lord. And the Lord made prostrations to Namdev thus signifying to him not to disclose His identity to others. Accepting the invitation of Namdev, the Lord consented to proceed to Pandharpur. Then Namdev returned to Pandharpur. Ettranna, the Lord in disguise, taking Gorakumbar and his family, proceeded to Pandharpur to attend the festival. Bhakta Namdev was conducting Kirtan. Gorakumbar, with his wives, attended the Kirtan. When deeply merged in Kirtan, to the surprise of all those who were assembled there, the hands of Gorakumbar were restored as before. Then, taking his wives, he went to the shrine of Panduranga and there mysteriously got back his lost child also. It came towards him crawling from the feet of the Lord. At the instance of the words of his Guru Veerasegarar, Gorakumbar returned with both his wives and child and lived with them happily at Thodagi.

JNANADEV

The name of Saint Jnaneshwar is on the lips of everyone in Maharashtra. He was a born Siddha. He was a Yogi of high attainments. He had control over the elements. His work *Jnaneshwari* is the crest-jewel of Marathi literature. The simple style, the beautiful illustrations and the apt similies have rendered the book attractive, charming and extremely useful. *Jnaneshwari* is to Maharashtrians what the Ramayan of Tulsidas is to the Hindi-speaking people. Jnanadev lived for a few years, but he did wonders. He was a genius, a Yogi of deep spiritual experiences and a sage of supreme order. He boldly criticized his predecessors. He was a great social and religious reformer. He laid the foundation of the great Bhakti movement in Maharashtra. He was a fine poet to boot.

The life-history, origin and other particulars of great saints, prophets and world teachers are all very strange and mysterious. Jnanadev was born of a Sannyasin. Lord Jesus was born of immaculate conception. And he was the son of a village carpenter. He was not born in a palace; he was born in a stable or a cave where there was a bundle of straw. Kabir was the son of a weaver. He was found in a lake. Sankara was a poor child of Kaladi.

Jnanadev, or Jnaneshwar (Lord of Jnana or knowledge) as he is sometimes called, was one of the ancient saints of Maharashtra. He, and Mukund Rai who lived about a hundred years earlier to him, are the founders of the Bhakti Panth in Maharashtra.

In the thirteenth century, there lived in Apegaon a village-accountant called Govindapanth. He had only one son named Vittalpanth. Vittalpanth was the father of Jnanadev. Vittalpanth was pious and dispassionate even from his boyhood. He was fond of pilgrimage to holy places. He was a profound scholar in Sanskrit. His heart yearned for Self-realisation. He had a great liking for taking Sannyasa.

Vittalpanth married Rukmabai, daughter of Sridharpanth of Alandi, which is twelve miles from Pune and which contains the Samadhi of Jnanadev.

Vittalpanth was disgusted with worldly life. He went out on a pilgrimage and returned back to Alandi. He wanted to take Sannyasa. His wife and father-in-law were not in favour of his taking Sannyasa.

Vittalpanth went to Varanasi and took Sannyasa from Sripad Yati (Ramananda Swami). Rukmabai came to know that her husband had entered the fourth Ashrama of life. This was a great shock to her. She prayed to God fervently for reunion with her husband.

Sripad Yati, the Guru of Vittalpanth, happened to come to Alandi on his way to Rameswaram. Rukmabai approached him and prostrated before him. The Yati blessed her: "You will be the mother of eight sons". Rukmabai wept bitterly. The Yati said, "O blessed lady! What is the cause of your sorrow?". Then Rukmabai explained everything to the Yati.

The Yati thought that the young man who took Sannyasa from him must be the husband of this lady. At once he gave up his idea of going to Rameswaram. He returned to Varanasi, rebuked his disciple and said, "Go back to Grihastha Ashrama and make your wife happy. She wants to serve you. My blessings are with you".

Then Vittalpanth carried out the orders of his Guru and came back to Alandi and lived with Rukmabai. The orthodox Brahmins of Alandi outcasted him and his wife. They said, "It is against scriptures to take to married life again after taking Sannyasa". But Vittalpanth thought that he was doing the right thing as he was following the instructions of his Guru.

In course of time, four children were born to Vittalpanth and Rukmabai—Nivritti in 1273 A.D., Jnanadev in 1275 A.D., Sopan in 1277 A.D. and Muktabai in 1279 A.D. (three sons and a daughter). Nivritti is regarded as an incarnation of Siva, Jnanadev as an incarnation of Hari, Sopan of Brahma and Muktabai of Sarasvati.

On one occasion, Vittalpanth went with his children to Tryambakeshwar, near Nasik, situated in the vicinity of the source of the river Godavari. As they were going round the Brahmagiri mountain, they met a tiger. Vittalpanth hurried away with his children, but missed Nivrittinath. Nivrittinath entered the cave of Jnaninath. Jnaninath initiated Nivritti into the mysteries of Yoga and gave him all his spiritual wealth. Some days later, Nivritti joined his father and younger brothers.

Nivritti became a disciple of Jnaninath, who himself was a disciple of Gorakhnath. Gorakhnath was a disciple of Matsyendranath who received spiritual instructions from Lord Siva Himself. Nivritti and Jnanadev studied Vedas under their father. They now made great progress in the study of spiritual books.

Vittalpanth, on his return to Alandi, was treated as an outcaste by the Brahmins. He and his family members were put to a great deal of hardship and humiliation. Other children of the village would not mix with their children in play.

The sons attained boyhood. The parents wanted to perform their holy-thread ceremony. The Brahmins declined to perform it. They said, "A Sannyasin should not lead the married life. The scriptures do not allow the performance of the thread ceremony of a Sannyasin's children. Sons born of a Sannyasin cannot have the right of wearing the thread. They cannot be considered as Brahmins. You and your wife have violated the sacred laws of the scriptures. There is only one Prayaschitta for you both. You both should give up your lives in the Triveni of Prayag".

Vittalpanth and Rukmabai left Alandi and sacrificed their lives at the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna at Prayag. They thought that the Brahmins would take pity on their sons at least then and perform the thread ceremony. Nivritti was then about ten years, Jnanadev about eight and the youngest about five years.

Jnanadev was very keen on wearing the holy thread in order to fulfil the desire of his parents who had sacrificed their lives even for that purpose. He again approached the Brahmins of Alandi. The Brahmins now were moved to pity when they saw the helpless condition of those boys. They said to them, "Bring a letter of authorization from the learned

Brahmins of Paithan. We will then perform the thread ceremony for you". The boys went to Paithan and saw the learned Brahmins. They recited the Vedas. The Brahmins said, "You are not entitled to recite the Vedas. Stop the recitation now. You are the sons of a Sannyasin who came back again to his Grihastha Ashrama". Jnanadev replied, "Anybody may recite the Vedas. Even this buffalo may recite". He placed his hand on the back of the buffalo and immediately the buffalo recited the Veda for one hour, from the point where Jnanadev had left, with correct rhythm and intonation. The Brahmins were struck with wonder and awe. They said, "These are not ordinary boys. They are the very incarnations of Shankar, Vishnu and Brahma". Really the boys were born Siddhas. Even then the Brahmins refused to perform the thread ceremony, though they admitted the greatness of the boys. The buffalo of Paithan died at Ale in the district of Pune. There is a Samadhi for this buffalo. This Samadhi exists even now.

The boys stayed at Paithan and taught the Gita to the people. Jnanadev performed many miracles. A Brahmin had to perform the anniversary of his father. The Brahmins did not turn up. Jnanadev brought the Pitris themselves to earth from the heaven. He brought to life a dead man. The man's name was Sachidananda Pava.

Jnanadev wrote *Jnaneshwari*, his wonderful commentary on the Gita, at the age of thirteen. The book was completed in 1212 at Nevasa, a town on the banks of the Pravara river in the district of Ahmednagar. The actual writer was Sachidananda Pava. Jnanadev's commentary on the Gita is considered as one of the best. In a big assembly of Sanskrit Pundits in Varanasi, Jnanadev was elected as the President.

Nivritti, Jnanadev, Sopan and Muktabai went on a pilgrimage and visited Pandharpur, Prabhasa, Dwaraka, Ayodhya, Mathura, Hardwar, Varanasi, Kanchi, Ujjain, Tirupathi, Rameswaram, Madurai, Gokaran and other places. Namdev accompanied them.

Jnanadev lived for about six years after he had completed *Jnaneshwari Gita.*

Jnanadev met Chang Dev. Chang Dev was a famous saint who had managed to defy death by his Yogic powers for a thousand and four hundred years. He used to live at Vateshwar. He was very proud of his attainments in Yoga. He had Bhuta Siddhi or complete control over all living beings. He used to travel on a tiger with a serpent as whip. Chang Dev had a curiosity to see Jnanadev. He started with a large number of disciples, riding on a tiger with a serpent as whip. Jnanadev and his brothers saw Chang Dev coming in all pomp. Jnanadev asked the wall on which he was seated to move forward to welcome Chang Dev.

Chang Dev witnessed this great miracle performed by Jnanadev. He was humiliated. He quietly got down from the tiger, made prostrations to Jnanadev and accepted him as his Guru.

Mukta, a mere girl of fourteen, gave instructions to Chang Dev, an old man of a thousand and four hundred years. She said, "O Chang Dev! Listen. If you want to attain salvation, the first step is sincere devotion. Devotion will bring Vairagya. Vairagya will lead to Jnana. Therefore your aim should be Jnana and your first foot must be on devotion".

Jnanadev had full control over the elements. When there was no vessel to prepare food, his sister prepared bread on his back. Jnanadev is regarded as an Avatara of Lord Krishna.

Nivritti was really the Guru of Jnanadev. Nivritti asked Jnanadev to write an independent book embodying all his experiences in Jnana. Jnanadev wrote *Amritanubhava* which contains the highest experiences of Jnanadev in 800 couplets.

Jnanadev made it known to his friends and brothers that it was his desire to enter into *Sanjivani Samadhi* or Samadhi while alive. This he did at Alandi on the 13th day of the dark half of the Kartik month, about the end of October 1296, in his twenty-second year. He drew up all the Prana to the Brahmarandra and gave up the physical body. If anybody reads the Gita written by him by the side of his Samadhi, all his doubts will be cleared.

All the other brothers and the sister also left the world within a short space of less than eight months. Sopan entered into Samadhi on the banks of the river Karha at Saswad, which is at the bottom of the hill Purandhar, near Pune. Chang Dev attained Samadhi in a village called Punatamba. Muktabai dissolved herself in the five elements at the age of eighteen, when there was a big storm. Nivritti entered into Samadhi at Tryambak which is at the source of the Godavari.

Thus passed the four great souls. Within a period of twenty-five years, they broke down the bigotry of the Brahmins of the period, raised them from the darkness of ignorance, firmly established the path of Bhakti and Jnana, made people realise that all were equal and that it was the actions which counted for the glory and excellence of a man and not the accident of birth or the mere study of the Vedas and Vedanta. Among Jnanadev's followers were Namdev, a tailor; Namdev's maid-servant Jani; Narahari, a goldsmith; Chokamela, a Mahar; Sena, a barber; Gora, a potter; Savanta, a gardener; and Bhagu, a Maharin, who were all respected as great devotees of Krishna.

Jnanadev was the founder of an institution called *Warkari Sampradaya* which is still alive in all its glory in Maharashtra. It is called "*Wari* to Pandharpur". All who have accepted this *Wari* undertake to go to Pandharpur on Ashadh Ekadasi (June-July) and Kartik Ekadasi (October-November) days every year. They must visit Pandharpur at least once annually, if not on both these days. It is considered so very sacred that except in the event of physical illness, they continue to go to Pandharpur year after year through the whole life and from generation to generation.

May you all draw inspiration from the life of Jnanadev! May you all soar high in the realms of knowledge by studying carefully *Jnaneshwari* and *Amritanubhava*! May the blessings of Jnanadev, a rare Siddha Yogi, be upon you all! May you all visit his place of Samadhi in Alandi during his anniversary day and receive the blessings of the saint who still feeds, in secrecy, his devotees with the nectar of immortality!!

Saints of North India

GOSWAMI TULSIDAS

Tulsidas was born in Rajpur, in the district of Banda in Uttar Pradesh, in Samvat 1589 or 1532 A.D. He was a Sarayuparina Brahmin by birth and is regarded as an incarnation of Valmiki, the author of Ramayana written in Sanskrit. His father's name was Atmaram Shukla Dube and his mother's name Hulsi. Tulsidas did not cry at the time of his birth. He was born with all the thirty-two teeth intact. In childhood his name was Tulsiram or Ram Bola.

Tulsidas's wife's name was Buddhimati (Ratnavali). Tulsidas's son's name was Tarak. Tulsidas was passionately attached to his wife. He could not bear even a day's separation from her. One day his wife went to her father's house without informing her husband. Tulsidas stealthily went to see her at night at his father-in-law's house. This produced a sense of shame in Buddhimati. She said to Tulsidas, "My body is but a network of flesh and bones. If you would develop for Lord Rama even half the love that you have for my filthy body, you would certainly cross the ocean of Samsara and attain immortality and eternal bliss". These words pierced the heart of Tulsidas like an arrow. He did not stay there even for a moment. He abandoned home and became an ascetic. He spent fourteen years in visiting the various sacred places of pilgrimage.

While returning from answering the calls of nature, Tulsidas used to throw the water that was left in his water-pot at the roots of a tree which a spirit was occupying. The spirit was very much pleased with Tulsidas. The spirit said, "O man! Get a boon from me". Tulsidas replied, "Let me have Darshan of Lord Rama". The spirit said, "Go to the Hanuman temple. There Hanuman comes in the guise of a leper to hear the *Ramayan* as the first hearer and leaves the place last of all. Get hold of him. He will help you". Accordingly, Tulsidas met Hanuman, and through His grace, had Darshan or vision of Lord Rama.

Tulsidas wrote twelve books. The most famous book is his Ramayan—*Ram-charit-manas*—in Hindi. He wrote this book under the directions of Hanuman. This Ramayan is read and worshipped with great reverence in every Hindu home in Northern India. It is an inspiring book. It contains sweet couplets in beautiful rhyme. *Vinaya Patrika* is another important book written by Tulsidas.

Some thieves came to Tulsidas's Ashram to take away his goods. They saw a blue-complexioned guard, with bow and arrow in his hands, keeping watch at the gate. Wherever they moved, the guard followed them. They were frightened. In the morning they asked Tulsidas, "O venerable saint! We saw a young guard with bow and arrow in his hands at the gate of your residence. Who is this man?". Tulsidas remained silent and wept. He came to know that Lord Rama Himself had been taking the trouble to protect his goods. He at once distributed all his wealth among the poor.

Tulsidas lived in Ayodhya for some time. Then he shifted to Varanasi. One day a murderer came and cried, "For the love of Rama give me alms. I am a murderer". Tulsi called him to his house, gave him sacred food which had been offered to the Lord and declared that the murderer was purified. The Brahmins of Varanasi reproached Tulsidas and said, "How can the sin of a murderer be absolved? How could you eat with him? If the sacred bull of Siva—Nandi—would eat from the hands of the murderer, then only we would accept that he had been purified". Then the murderer was taken to the temple and the bull ate from his hands. The Brahmins were put to shame.

Tulsidas once went to Brindavan. He visited a temple. He saw the image of Lord Krishna. He said, "How shall I describe Thy beauty, O Lord! But Tulsi will bow his head only when You take up bow and arrow in Your hands". The Lord revealed Himself before Tulsidas in the form of Lord Rama with bow and arrows.

Tulsidas's blessings brought the dead husband of a poor woman back to life. The Moghul emperor at Delhi came to know of the great miracle done by Tulsidas. He sent for Tulsidas. Tulsidas came to the emperor's court. The emperor asked the saint to perform some miracle. Tulsidas replied, "I have no superhuman power. I know only the name of Rama". The emperor put Tulsi in prison and said, "I will release you only if you show me a miracle". Tulsi then prayed to Hanuman. Countless bands of powerful monkeys entered the royal court. The emperor got frightened and said, "O saint, forgive me. I know your greatness now". He at once released Tulsi from prison.

Tulsi left his mortal coil and entered the Abode of Immortality and Eternal Bliss in 1623 A.D. at the age of ninety-one at Asighat in Varanasi.

KABIR

Kabir was born in 1440 A.D. The probable date of his death is 1519 A.D. as mentioned in Kabir Ka Santi. Kabir died at Maghar near Gorakhpur. He was found lying as a child in the lake called Lahar Talao near Kashi on a leaf of lotus. Here he was found by Niru, a childless Mohammedan weaver who was going with his wife Nima to attend a function in a neighbouring village. They took compassion on the forsaken baby. They took him to their home and there they brought him up as their own child. A Kazi was called in to give the child a name. The Kazi told Niru that the child was a demon and should be killed immediately. A miracle happened. The knife was plunged into the heart of the child. No drop of blood came out. Kabir uttered a verse which made them understand that he was not ordinary flesh and blood. Then the name 'Kabir' was given to the child. The word 'Kabir' means 'great' in the Arabic language.

Kabir seems to have been of Hindu parentage, though adopted and brought up as a Mohammedan. It is said that he was born of a Brahmin girl-widow, who, to hide her shame, left the child in the lake. But in a stanza, Kabir denies his own conception in a womb. He says that he was not born nor did he dwell in a womb (vide page 122, Vol. VI, of Macauliff's Sikh Religion). Kabir grew up without food. His adopted parents became very anxious about him. Then he began to drink the milk of a calf which yielded milk daily in a miraculous manner.

The life of Kabir is shrouded in mystery. We know nothing of his early training and career. What has been discovered in the way of his biographical details is very little. Beyond the facts that he was a weaver, born of poverty-stricken parents, that he lived at Kashi during the reign of Sikander Lodi, that he was a disciple of the great religious reformer Ramananda, and that he himself was the Guru of a number of distinguished disciples, we know positively nothing about Kabir.

From his early boyhood, Kabir was very much religiously inclined. He was of a reflective disposition. He had very often his mystic moods. Even in his childhood he engaged himself in discussions about God with Sadhus. He received and served Sadhus and Sannyasins with intense devotion and faith. Though his foster-father got him married, Kabir was not attached to home and family. He used to roam about the holy city of Kashi. He earned his livelihood from the loom.

Kabir's initiation

Kabir remained for a long time without a Guru. He wanted to become the disciple of Ramananda. As he was a Mohammedan, he doubted whether Ramananda would accept him as his disciple. One day, he went and hid himself on the steps of the Ghat of the Ganges to which Ramananda used to come every morning to take his bath. That day, the great preacher Ramananda came to bathe as usual. It was still dark. Ramananda did not see the sleeping Kabir. He placed his feet upon Kabir's chest. As soon as he found out that he had trodden upon a human body, he cried out 'Ram...Ram...'. Kabir started up and said, "I have found him at last". He fell at the feet of Ramananda and said, "Thou hast given me the word of initiation and I am thy disciple now". Ramananda was struck with the sincerity and devotion of Kabir and accepted him as his disciple. Kabir was formally initiated by the great teacher.

Kabir joined in the theological and philosophical disputes which his master held with all the great Mullahs and Brahmins of his day. A famous Brahmin named Sarvajit, who was well-versed in logic, came to Kashi. The Pundits of Kashi informed Ramananda of the arrival of the learned Brahmin and told him that no one could defeat the erudite logician. Ramananda sent Kabir to argue with him. The orthodox Pundit asked: "O Kabir! What is your caste?". Kabir replied, "I am a weaver". The proud Pundit sneered at Kabir in a contemptuous manner and asked what a weaver was. Kabir replied:

"No one knoweth the secret of the weaver,
God hath woven the warp of the whole world.
If thou listen to the Vedas and the Puranas,
Thou shalt hear: 'I have stretched the warp so long;
I have made the Earth and Firmament my workshop,
I have set the Sun and the Moon in alternate motion,
Working my legs I did one work'—with such a weaver
my heart is pleased."
(Macauliff)

Kabir was like Guru Nanak. He was loved by both the Hindus and the Mohammedans. He was not of one religion or of one nation. He was the prophet of universal brotherhood. He did not observe the rules of caste. He recognised the higher harmony of Hinduism and Islam. He realised the truth that religion, spirituality, love, devotion, faith and divine life were the monopoly of no one religion, but were common to all religions. Kabir's religion was a religion of simplicity. His motto was love. His means of salvation was devotion to God and God alone. Kabir's home was the universe, his brother was mankind and his great father was the Father in Heaven. Kabir did not renounce the world in order to devote himself to the practice of severe austerities and meditation. He was a dynamic Yogi. He worked at the loom, and at the same time, his mind was ever fixed on God.

Kabir began to attract a large number of people. Many became his disciples. They all gathered round him at the loom or in the market-place to listen to his sweet, soul-stirring and sublime songs and inspiring discourses. Mysterious are the ways of prophets and saints! They preach silently. Wise men only are profited by their teachings. They only can really understand them. Kabir preached the unity of men and creeds. The orthodox Brahmins of Kashi tried their level best to pull him down. They sent a young and beautiful courtesan to tempt Kabir, but like the Magdalene of Biblical story, she was converted by the spiritual power of Kabir.

Kabir was an exponent of Nirguna Bhakti. He had supreme love for all. He was exceedingly kind and compassionate. He was fearless. He never asked anybody to follow him. He roamed about the country singing his songs. He condemned all formalities and ritualism. He made a vehement criticism of conventions. He was a social revolutionary. He also endeavoured strenuously for the social, moral and spiritual uplift of the people. That is the reason why he still lives in the heart of all people.

Kabir was a great propagandist in his own way. He tried his level best to bring about concord and harmony among the diversity existing around him. His poetry was full of criticism of the Mullahs and the priests. Kabir not only preached, but lived the life of unity of men and creeds. He used his songs as weapons against the Mullahs and the priests. He did not spare words in the wars he waged against Muslim and Hindu orthodoxy. Kabir was a powerful saint with Self-realisation which lent him the authority to live and preach the Truth without fear or restraint.

Kabir says, "I am the child of Allah and of Ram". It is very difficult to say whether he was a Brahmin or a Mohammedan, a Sufi or a Vedantin, a Vaishnavite or a Ramanandin. The Hindus take him as a Brahmin saint, the Mohammedans regard him as a Sufi. A sect known as 'Kabir-panth', to which some lakhs of Hindus of Northern India still belong, was founded by Kabir's followers. But Kabir himself was above all sects, cults and creeds. The story that at his death the Hindus and the Mohammedans quarrelled over his corpse, each group claiming him as a follower of their own religion, lends support to this view. Narsi Mehta, Vidyapati, Umapati, Mira Bai and Raidas were some of the famous contemporaries of Kabir.

Kabir, the poet-saint of Kashi, is one of the most interesting personalities in the history of Indian mysticism. He was an illustrious philosopher-poet. He was a skilled musician and a poet as well. He was a prophet. His songs are wonderful. They are the spontaneous expressions of his spiritual experience and his love. Kabir used homely metaphors in his songs. He sang his religion in popular verse. His verses are repeated, even today, in almost every household in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. Kabir's doctrines are soul-stirring and magnanimous. Some of Kabir's poems are very mystic.

Kabir had marvellous spiritual powers. He did a number of miracles. It is recorded that a cloth was woven by Krishna for him. It was the most splendid coloured cloth that was ever seen in Kashi. It was woven not of threads but of the rays of sunlight and shot through with beams here and there of the most delicate rainbow.

The Kazi killed a cow. Kabir raised the dead cow back to life in order to expiate for the heinous crime of cow-killing.

Some people complained to the emperor Sikander Lodi that Kabir was leading the people astray by preaching false doctrines. Kabir was brought before the emperor. The courtiers asked Kabir to make salutations to the emperor. Kabir replied: "I have no business with an emperor. I can do business with my God alone, my God who is the support of this world and who is the real Emperor of this world. I know the Name of God. I can sing His praise only. I can meditate on Him. I do not know how to prostrate before an emperor. I have never attended the court or Durbar of any emperor up to this time". Sikander Lodi became angry when he heard the words of Kabir; but he, being a man of culture, allowed Kabir to go back peacefully. Though his life was spared, Kabir was banished from the city of Kashi. This took place in 1495 A.D. when Kabir was fifty-six years of age.

The name of Kabir's wife was Loi. Kamal was his son. Dharam Das was his chief disciple. Jhali, queen of Chitore, was his royal disciple. Kabir used to live with his wife in a hut in a solitary place outside the city. He used to feed the Sadhus or ascetics who went to his place. One day he had nothing. Many hungry ascetics came to his hut. Kabir was in an agitated condition. His wife said, "O Lord, if you permit me, I can get some money from the banker's son". Kabir said, "How can you get the money from him? He is a very great miser". His wife said, "He is very much enamoured of me. He said the other day that he would give me money. Let us take the money and teach him a very good lesson". Kabir replied, "That is good. Go to him immediately and bring some money. The ascetics are very hungry. They have not taken any food for the last three days".

Loi went to the house of the banker and saw his young son. She promised to meet him at night. He at once gave her the money she needed. Loi came back to her hut and handed over the money to her husband. All the Sadhus were fed sumptuously.

There was a great downpour of rain that night. There was a big storm also. Kabir covered his wife with a blanket and took her on his shoulder, in storm and rain, to the house of the banker. Loi entered the compartment of the banker's son. Kabir waited outside to take her back home. The young man rejoiced at the sight of Loi. He was quite astonished to see her in his room on such a stormy and rainy night. He said to her, "My dear, how have you managed to come to my house? You are not drenched. Your feet are quite clean. There is no mud on your feet. It is a great wonder!". Loi replied, "My husband has carried me here on his shoulder". The young man was struck with amazement and awe. He became a changed man at once. He wept bitterly and said, "Loi, has your husband brought you to me?". He regarded Loi as his mother and at once prostrated at her feet. He said to her, "Thou art my mother. Forgive me for my evil intention". He ran to the place where Kabir was standing. He fell at his feet and cried, "O venerable Guru! I am a great sinner. Purify me. Elevate me. Bless me. I take refuge in thy lotus feet. I am a suppliant before thee. I am thy humble devotee". From that day the banker's son became one of the faithful devotees of Kabir.

Mysterious are the ways of saints and prophets. By their simple touch and Darshan, the worst sinners and scoundrels become transmuted into great saints. Extreme Rajas takes a Sattvic turn. The passionate young man, the banker's son whose mind was filled with Rajas, became a pious and Sattvic man.

One day, Jahangast, a Mohammedan Fakir who heard of the great fame of Kabir, went to see him. He was jealous of Kabir. Kabir quickly tied a fat pig at his door. The Fakir saw the pig and did not enter the compound of Kabir's hut. Kabir called him back and said, "O great Fakir! Why are you running now? I have tied up the unclean pig at my door. But you have tied what is unclean—anger, pride, greed and jealousy—in your heart". The Fakir bent his head down in shame. He asked Kabir's pardon and immediately became his disciple.

Kabir's works

Kabir's works are mostly collections of songs composed in the various metres of old Hindi. There are seventy-two works. The most important and famous works are: the *Kabir Bijak*, the *Suknidhan, Sabdas, Sakhis, Rekhtas, Mangal, Vasant* and *Holi Agams*. The *Kabir Bijak* is the great authority on all religious matters and doctrines of the Kabir-panthis.

Kabir's language is very simple. His style is beautiful. His expression of ideas is very bold. His poetic composition is most natural. Each couplet is pregnant with deep significance. The similies and metaphors are most appropriate. Other characteristic features are depth of feeling and directness of speech. The expressions have emanated straight from Kabir's heart. Kabir's skill in compressing a world of sense in a simple couplet is marvellous and unrivalled. His sayings are unparalleled. His poems are soul-stirring and inspiring. There is depth of thought and penetrative insight.

Kabir's death

When Kabir died, his body was claimed by both the Hindus and the Mohammedans. The King of Kashi, with thousands of Hindus, wanted to cremate the body. The Hindus claimed that Kabir was a Hindu and that therefore his body should be burnt. Bizli Khan, with thousands of Mohammedans, wanted to bury it. The Mohammedans said that Kabir was a Muslim and therefore his body ought to be buried under Mohammedan rites.

While they were quarrelling, Kabir's apparition appeared and said, "I was neither a Hindu nor a Mohammedan. I was both. I was nothing. I was all. I discern God in both. There is no Hindu and no Mussalman. To him who is free from delusion, Hindu and Mussalman are the same. Remove the shroud and behold the miracle!".

The shroud was removed. A large quantity of flowers was seen under it. Half of the flowers was taken by the King of Kashi and burnt on the bank of the holy Ganges. The ashes were then buried and a temple was built. This temple is known by the name of *Kabir Cheura*—a great place of pilgrimage for the followers of Kabir. The other half of the flowers was taken by the Mohammedans and buried at *Maghar* where Kabir died. A mosque was built over the grave. This is a place of pilgrimage for the Mohammedans.

Sayings of Kabir

1. The life is passed in turning the beads, but the darkness of the heart is not destroyed. Leave the turning of beads by the hand, but turn the beads of your mind.
2. If you have no devotion to God, you will not gain anything by pilgrimage. You may roam over the country and yet your heart will be impure. The man who has gone to Varanasi to see Lord Viswanath, but has not destroyed hypocrisy, lust and greed and has no devotion, will gain nothing.
3. I am very fond of the words of my sweetheart—Beloved (God). I do not get any solace if anybody tries to console me in other ways. If you make a fish lie on a golden cot and give it ambrosia to drink, it will surely die in no time.
4. The diamond appraiser only can know the value of the diamond. Kabir says: only he who has developed devotion can attain God.
5. Show thou a rose to him that showeth thee a thorn. To thee there is always a rose; to him there is a thorn for ever more.
6. Have no faith in this perishable body. Remember the Lord by all your breaths; that is the only way to salvation.
7. "Why dost thou trample upon me?" crieth the earth to the potter, "A day will come when I shall trample upon thee".
8. The body is an inn and the mind a bird that has willingly taken a lodging in it. It is but a truism that none is none's relative.
9. 'Virtue' abides where there is compassion, 'vice' where there is greed; 'death' where there is wrath, and the Lord Himself where there is forgiveness.

10. Every forest does not contain a sandal tree; every army does not contain a real soldier; every sea does not contain pearls; even so, a Sadhu or a saint or a Mahatma is not found everywhere in the world.
11. Have patience; everything comes out in time. The gardener waters the plant daily, but it bears fruit only in season.
12. If I turn the whole earth into paper, all the trees into pens and the seven seas into ink, even then the greatness of the Lord cannot be fully described.
13. There is no greater evil than a bad word; it burns everything into ashes. A kind word is, on the contrary, like rain that falls in nectar-like torrents.
14. A word is priceless if one knows how to use it. Let every word be weighed in the scales of the heart before it is given out.
15. Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today, nor till the evening what you can do this very moment; for you know not when death may overtake you, upsetting all your plans.
16. He alone is the hero who has all the five senses at his command. He who has no such control never approaches the Lord.
17. A dumb man, having tasted sugar, cannot express its taste. Even so, the experience of Self-realisation cannot be expressed.
18. Just as sugar toys are made of sugar and sugar exists in all of them, even so, the whole universe exists in Brahman and Brahman in it.
19. The sugar and the sugar toys are not two things; they both are one. Similarly, when real knowledge dawns, the manifold universe appears as one.
20. Just as the tree is in the seed and the seed in the tree, even so is the world in Brahman.

THE SAINTLY KING PIPA

Pipa was born in the year 1525 A.D. He was the king of the state known as Gagaraunghra. Pipa was a righteous king. He ruled the state justly and wisely. He served the Sannyasins, ascetics and Brahmins. He had intense devotion to them. Though a king, he led a very simple life. Luxury was unknown to him. He meditated regularly and studied the holy scriptures. The Sadhus and ascetics prayed to the Lord that Pipa might become a saint.

Pipa had a vision. A saint appeared in his vision and said, "Beloved Pipa, go to Varanasi and serve the great teacher Swami Ramananda". Pipa at once proceeded to Varanasi. He sent a message to Sri Ramananda that he wanted to pay his respects to him. Ramananda sent him this reply: "There is no business for a king here. My abode is meant for wandering ascetics and Sadhus who have embraced poverty".

Pipa then returned to his Capital and distributed all his own wealth to the poor. He again went to Varanasi to see Ramananda. Ramananda wanted to test the sincerity of Pipa. He wanted to find out whether Pipa had Guru Bhakti, devotion to Guru. Ramananda said, "Pipa, I am glad to hear that you have distributed your wealth to the poor and embraced poverty. This shows you have dispassion and discrimination. Now throw yourself into a well".

Pipa at once went to a neighbouring well to throw himself into it. The disciples of Ramananda stopped him. Ramananda was highly satisfied with the sincerity and devotion of Pipa. He accepted him as his disciple and gave him initiation.

In these days, if the Guru even *speaks* an unkind word to test the disciple, the disciple will leave the Guru immediately. That is the reason why the present-day disciples do not prosper in the spiritual line.

Pipa returned to his Capital with the permission of his Guru. He served the devotees and ascetics and practised regular meditation in accordance with the instructions of his Guru.

Pipa invited his Guru to his place. Ramananda accepted the invitation. He went to the Capital with his disciples. Pipa ran barefoot to welcome his Guru. He paid his respects to the disciples also. He fed the poor on a very grand scale. Sankirtan was conducted in his palace.

Ramananda wanted to go to Dwaraka. Pipa was very much troubled at heart, because he had to lose the holy company of his Guru. Ramananda said, "Pipa, you also can follow me if you take to the ascetic order". Pipa abdicated the throne in favour of his son, joined the ascetic order and followed Ramananda. Sita, the wife of Pipa, also joined the order. They all proceeded to Dwaraka.

Lord Buddha abandoned his kingdom. Raja Gopichand also did the same. Raja Bhartrihari kicked the state as a straw. The happiness of a king is nothing when compared to the happiness of God-realisation. Spiritual wealth is real inexhaustible wealth. Pipa realised this and so he also abandoned the kingdom.

In Dwaraka Pipa plunged inside the sea to visit the sublime temple of Sri Krishna. He was affectionately received by the Lord. After spending some days with Him, he returned. Pipa's fame spread now. Great crowds came to see him. This disturbed Pipa's devotional practices. He left Dwaraka privately. On the road, some Pathans carried away his wife, but Rama Himself rescued her and slew the ravishers.

Pipa came across a furious lion in the forest. He hung a rosary round his neck and whispered the Mantra of Rama and made him tranquil in a moment. He then gave a lecture to the lion on the impropriety of devouring men and kine and sent him away penitent and with the pious purpose to do so no more.

One day Pipa went to take bath in a river. He found a vessel full of gold coins. But he did not touch it. He mentioned this to his wife at night. Some thieves, who overheard this, went to the place in search of gold. They did not find gold coins, but found a venomous snake coiled up in the vessel. The thieves thought that the saint had planned to kill them. They brought the vessel with its contents and threw it into the house of Pipa. Pipa found the vessel filled with the gold coins as before. He spent the gold in feeding the poor and the mendicants.

Pipa had a cow to supply milk to the ascetics. One day the cow was stolen by some thieves. Pipa took the young calf and went after the thieves crying, "Kindly take the calf also, otherwise you will not get any milk". This touched the heart of the thieves. They repented for their wrong action and returned the cow to Pipa.

Once Pipa and his wife Sita went to see a devotee called Sridhara. Sridhara was extremely poor. He sold the cloth of his wife in order to entertain his guests. They all sat to take food. Sita said, "O holy devotee, where is your wife?". Sridhara was in a fix. His wife could not appear before them as she was half-clad. Sita found out the reason. She thought that her own devotion and service was nothing when compared to that of the wife of Sridhara. She gave half of her own cloth to the wife of Sridhara and brought her out in their midst.

Pipa and Sita spent the remaining portion of their life in Japa, Kirtan, meditation, study of sacred scriptures and service of ascetics and devotees.

Pipa and Sita are models of purity, devotion and service. Modern kings and queens should draw inspiration from them and lead the ideal life they led.

Glory to Pipa and Sita and their Guru Sri Ramananda who opened their eyes by the collyrium of wisdom.

NARSI MEHTA

Narsi Mehta belonged to a Vadanagar Nagar-Brahmin family of Junagarh in Kathiawar, Gujarat. He was born of a very poor family. From his very boyhood he had great devotion to Lord Krishna. He lived with his brother. All the time he kept singing songs on Krishna and Gopi Lila and dancing in ecstasy. As he did not care a bit for any of the household matters and as he did not earn anything, his brother's wife taunted and ill-treated him. Narsi Mehta never entertained any idea of earning his livelihood. He had the firm conviction that Lord Krishna would provide him with all his wants. This was due to his previous Samskaras. He was of a happy-go-lucky nature. He did Tapasya at Gopinath, situated on the seaside. He had the Darshan of Lord Krishna through the grace of Lord Siva. He came back to his house and got married. He had a son by name Shyamaldass and a daughter by name Kunwarbai.

Narsi Mehta was a contemporary of Mira Bai. He had Sakhya Bhav. He would address Lord Krishna in terms of equality. He was a simple-minded, frank Bhakta. He saw Lord Krishna everywhere and in everything. He had Para Bhakti and cosmic consciousness. He composed a poem 'Hari Mala'. It is said that his daughter's marriage was conducted by Lord Krishna Himself with great pomp and eclat. Though Narsi Mehta was very poor, rich marriage-presents given to Kunwarbai's mother-in-law greatly astonished all.

Many miracles happened in Narsi Mehta's life. He had direct Darshan of Lord Krishna on several occasions. Once he was moving with his brother along a road. He was very hungry. He could not get any food on the way. There Lord Krishna took the form of a shepherd boy and gave him good food in a small cottage. Narsi asked his orthodox brother to partake of the food and said to him that it was Lord Krishna Himself who was serving him. His brother had no faith. Narsi and his brother continued their journey onwards. Narsi's brother forgot to take his vessel from the cottage. He ran back to the place and found out the vessel, but there was neither cottage nor shepherd boy. It was all the grace of Krishna, who served His Bhakta to keep up His word in the Gita:

Ananyashchintayanto Mam Ye Janah Paryupasate
Tesham Nityabhiyuktanam Yogakshemam Vahamyaham
(Ch. IX-22)

Narsi's brother repented very much for not taking food along with Narsi.

On another occasion, Narsi was performing his father's Sraddha (the annual offering of Pindas to the departed souls). There was shortage of Ghee. Narsi went to the bazaar to purchase Ghee. On the way he met a Sankirtan party and joined them. He began singing Hari Bhajans and dancing in an ecstatic mood. He entirely forgot all about Sraddha and Ghee. His poor wife was waiting and waiting anxiously for him. Two miracles happened then. It was all Krishna's grace to help His Bhakta. The first miracle was that the sun did not move a bit in the firmament. It stood still. Nobody knew how much time had actually passed. Secondly, Lord Krishna assumed the form of Narsi, brought Ghee and handed it over to Narsi's wife. She gave mild rebuke also to Krishna who was there acting the part of Narsi. All the Brahmins were nicely fed. They departed with joy. The function was over. Narsi's wife started arranging the things and cleaning the room and the verandah. Then came Narsi with Ghee in hand and apologized to his wife for coming late.

After the death of his wife and son, Narsi became more free. He began devoting all his time to worship and singing of Bhajans. He became an Ativarnashrami. He broke down all caste rules and observances. He held Kirtan everywhere, even in the houses of sweepers and men of inferior caste. The other Nagar-Brahmins hated Narsi and also outcasted him. They refused to admit him in one of their feasts. Another miracle happened now. A Dom or a man of inferior caste was found by the side of each Brahmin. The haughty Nagar-Brahmins were cowed down. They began to show respect to Narsi. They openly admitted and declared that Narsi Mehta was a great Bhakta.

The world has not produced a Bhakta greater than Narsi in this Yuga. Narsi's devotion was of a unique nature. He has pointed out to the world the true path of devotion. That is the reason why he still lives in our hearts, why his inspiring song, "*Vaishnava Janatho Thene Kahiye*", which gives a fine description of a true Vaishnava, is sung even today by all the Bhaktas.

Glory to Narsi! Glory to Hari! Glory to His Name!

DADU

Dadu was a cotton cleaner by profession. He was born at Ahmedabad. He flourished about 1544-1603 A.D.—about the end of Akbar's reign or the beginning of that of Jehangir. In his twelfth year, Dadu was removed to Sambhur in Ajmer. He then went to Kalyanpur. Afterwards, in his thirty-seventh year, he proceeded to Naraina, a place which is eight miles from Sambhur and twenty miles from Jaipur. There, Dadu was admonished by a voice from heaven to stick to a religious life. Therefore, he retired to the Vaherana mountain which is ten miles from Naraina. After sometime he disappeared and no traces of him could be found. His followers believe that he was absorbed in God.

The followers of Dadu wear no peculiar frontal mark or Mala. They carry a rosary and wear a peculiar sort of cap—a round white cap with four corners and a flap hanging down behind.

The Dadu Panthis are of three classes—the Viraktas, who go bare-headed and who have one cloth and one water-pot; the Nagas, who carry arms and are good soldiers; and the Vistar Dharis who do the avocations of ordinary life.

The Dadu Panthis are numerous in Marwar and Ajmer. Their chief place of worship is at Naraina. The scriptures of this sect are preserved and worshipped here. A Mela or fair is held at Naraina in the month of February. A small building on the hill marks the place of Dadu's disappearance. The tenets of the Dadu Panthis are contained in several Hindi books. Many passages from Kabir's writings are found inserted in these books. The general character of the sacred books of the Dadu Panthis is of the same nature as that of Kabir's writings. The Dadu Panthis keep friendship with the followers of Kabir.

Dadu was the son of Lodi Ram. Garibdas and Miskindas were his disciples. Dadu died at the age of fifty-nine. He was a weaver by profession. He belonged to the Kabir school of

Vaishnavism. Dadu was sixth in descent from Ramananda—Kabir, Kamal, Jamal, Vimal, Budhan and Dadu. Budhan was his Guru.

The songs and Vanis of Dadu are collected in book form. The book contains five thousand verses. The Vanis are moral discourses. The songs are hymns or psalms. Dadu's songs are outbursts of ecstasy and love. Dadu preached the doctrine of universal love and peace.

Dadu's language is simple. His style is homely. There is fine music in his words, a music which penetrates deep into the heart.

Dadu proclaimed the unity of divine life. His philosophy is essentially practical. He avoids all dogmas and metaphysical discussions.

AKHA

Akha was a celebrated saint of Gujarat. He was a goldsmith by profession. He went to Varanasi. There Swami Brahmananda was holding Vedantic classes at night. Akha could not get admission. So he began to hide himself at night in a dustbin behind Swami Brahmananda's residence and attentively hear the lessons. This continued for a year. One day, when one of the students was not able to answer a question put to him by the Swamiji, Akha gave the correct answer loudly from behind the wall. Swami Brahmananda was puzzled and asked who it was that gave such a beautiful answer. "I am Akha from Gujarat" was the reply. The Swamiji said, "Come inside, Akha". Akha went inside and prostrated before the Swamiji.

The Swamiji said, "Who are you, Akha, and how did you manage to come here at this hour?". Akha said, "Swami, I am a goldsmith. I am a strong Mumukshu. I have been hiding myself every day in this dustbin for the last twelve months and hearing your instructions attentively. Kindly initiate me". Swami Brahmananda was very much pleased, and finding him a suitable Adhikari, initiated him into the mysteries of Kaivalya. Akha became a full-blown Jnani. His songs of wisdom have been collected and published in book form. The book has been prescribed as a text for the M.A. course in the Bombay University.

MILAREPA OF TIBET

Milarepa was a reputed Yogi of Tibet. He was one who had been profoundly impressed from his youth by the transient and impermanent nature of all conditions of worldly existence and by the sufferings and wretchedness in which he saw all beings immersed. To him existence seemed like a huge furnace where all living creatures were roasting. With such piercing sorrow did this fill his heart that he was unable to feel any envy, even of the celestial felicity enjoyed by Brahma and Indra in their heavens, much less of the earthly joys and delights afforded by a life of worldly greatness.

On the other hand, Milarepa was so captivated by the vision of immaculate purity, by the chaste beauty in the description of the state of perfect freedom and omniscience associated with the attainment of Nirvana, that he was prepared to risk his very life in the search on which he had set his heart, endowed as he was with full faith, a keen intellect and a heart overflowing with all-pervading love and sympathy for all.

Having obtained transcendental knowledge in the control of the ethereal and spiritual nature of the mind, Milarepa was able to furnish a demonstration thereof by flying through the sky, by walking, resting and sleeping on the air. Likewise, he was able to produce flames of fire and springs of water from his body and to transform his body at will into any object desired, thereby convincing unbelievers and turning them towards religious pursuits.

Milarepa was perfect in the practice of the four stages of meditation and thus he was able to project his subtle body so as to be present as the presiding Yogi simultaneously in twenty-four holy places where gods and angels assemble like clouds for spiritual communion.

Milarepa was able to dominate gods and elementals and make them carry out his commands instantaneously in the fulfilment of all duties. He was a perfect adept in supernatural powers. He was able to traverse and visit all the innumerable sacred paradises and heavens of the Buddhas, where by virtue of his unsurpassed devotion, the Buddhas and Bodhisatvas presiding therein favoured him with discourses on the Dharma and listened to his in return, so that he sanctified the heaven-worlds by his visits and sojourns.

GORAKHNATH

Gorakhnath was a great Yogi like Jnanadev of Alandi. In Chandragiri village, on the banks of the Godavari, there was a Brahmin named Suraj. His wife Sarasvati was a very pious and virtuous lady. But they had one great sorrow. They had no children. Once Yogi Matsyendranath happened to go to their house for Bhiksha. The pious lady was overjoyed and she served the Yogi with great reverence and devotion. The lady also told him of their misfortune in not being blessed with children. The Yogi gave her a pinch of holy ash with his blessings. Sometime later, a male child was born to her. When the boy was twelve years of age, the Yogi, Matsyendranath, came to their house and took away the boy with him for his education and initiation and made him his disciple. He sent the boy to Badrinath for doing Tapas. Apsaras and Devatas came to molest the boy, but he stood firm and tided over all temptations. He got tremendous Siddhi. Matsyendranath also imparted all his powers and Vidyas to this boy, his disciple, who later became known as Gorakhnath.

Gorakhnath performed Tapas for twelve long years, living on air alone. He gained tremendous Yogic powers. When his Guru Matsyendranath entered the dead body of a Raja (Parakaya Pravesh) to obey the orders of Hanuman to produce an offspring through a certain Rani, Gorakhnath assumed the form of a lady through his Yogic powers (Kamarupa Siddhi). At some other time, Gorakhnath made a toy out of clay, infused life into it and gave that child as a playmate to the children of a certain village. He converted a portion of a mountain into gold and reconverted it to its former condition. He passed urine over a rock. It became gold. Once in a Kumbha Mela, on the banks of the Godavari, he gave food—rich meals—to the liking of everyone through his Yogic powers. In the same Mela, he slowly reduced himself in bulk and assumed the form of a mosquito (Anima Siddhi). Through his own Yogic power, he burnt himself into ashes and again assumed his original form. He did Akasa-gamanam or walking, in the sky. In this way, he performed many Siddhis. Raja Bhartrihari was his disciple.

SAINT HARIDAS

The life of a true saint is verily a practical demonstration of the truths of religion. It is a living proof of the verities of spiritual life. Through their every act, the saints confirm and substantiate what the scriptures proclaim and declare. They glorify the great truths so that others may be enthused to aspire after them.

The life of Haridas was such a unique and exemplary one. Haridas was the very personification of Nam Nishtha. His wonderful faith in the Divine Name and unshakable adherence to it was nothing short of marvellous. All that the sacred lore of the Hindu religion asserted about the potency and supreme efficacy of the Lord's Name was fully made manifest in the blessed life of Haridas. Verily, this gem among devotees showed to the world that man did not live by bread alone, but could live on the Name of the Lord.

Mahatma Haridas was born in the village Burhan, situated in the Jashor district of Bengal. He was a Mohammedan by birth. His parents died while he was but a child. Being an orphan, Haridas used to wander all over the streets of the town, singing the Name of the Lord. Really speaking, he did not have even a Kamandal to drink water. He lived on the food got by begging from place to place. And he spent the whole day in singing the Name of Hari. Haridas used to finish three lakhs of Nama Japa in twenty-four hours, and that too, loudly and not in a whisper.

Gradually the public came to know about the existence of this great Bhakta who was living alone in the jungle and daily finishing three lakh repetitions of the Lord's Name in loud and melodious tune. People from afar came to have his Darshan, but the fame of this holy man became unbearable to the wicked persons. They became jealous of him without any cause.

Among those persons, there was one man named Ramchandrakhan, the landlord of the town nearby, who wanted to bring disgrace upon Haridas. He tried to drag the saint down through various temptations. But all went in vain, because the Lord was always with Haridas in order to protect him. Who has got the courage and power to do any evil to the devotees of the Lord? When Ramchandrakhan saw that he could not seduce Haridas by means of various temptations, he engaged the services of a harlot to put obstacles in his Bhajan. He did not know that to such as were immersed in the sweet names of Hari, these earthly beauties were petty and despicable.

Haridas remained unshaken before the harlot, even in the midst of the secluded jungle. She could not tempt him in any way. She could not divert him from his staunch devotion and worship of the Lord. Wonderful was Haridas's renunciation and dispassion! Praiseworthy was his sense-control. It is said that Kamini is the greatest obstacle in the path of a spiritual man. But, to Haridas, there was nothing except his Beloved Lord. He went on chanting the sweet name of Hari:
"*Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare,*
Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare!"

Four days passed. Daily the woman came and returned without any success. Whenever she wanted to ask anything, Haridas used to reply, "Kindly wait a little. Let me finish my prescribed number of Japa. Later on I will talk to you". Likewise she was daily coming in the early morning and sitting until midday. Haridas was ever busy in his Nama Sankirtan. The wretched woman, coming daily, used to sit for hours together repeating the same Mantra. Arriving at evening, she used to continue the chant till late after midnight. Haridas's Japa proceeded apace without any break.

The four days of divine chanting and saintly company transformed the woman from vice to virtue. Her heart was rung by remorse. Repenting bitterly, she threw herself at the saint's feet and supplicated for forgiveness.

Greatly moved, the saint Haridas consoled the woman, spoke to her words of hope and initiated her into the Divine Name. He called her Haridasi, by which name she came to be known thenceforth.

Haridasi distributed all her wealth in charity among the poor and took up her abode in the humble Kutir of Haridas, while Haridas himself departed to Santipur. There, in the nearby village of Fulia, he built a Kutia and resided therein entirely engaging himself in singing the Lord's Name. Really, a devotee of Hari, wherever he goes, takes the flowers of joy with him. There is no condition of distress for him, for he is always immersed in the fathomless ocean of Bhakti.

The prestige and influence of Haridas came to be known to a local Kazi, named Gorai, and his envy knew no bounds. After much thought, Gorai took a report about Haridas to the Royal Court and had him arrested. After hearing the case, a sentence was passed that Haridas should be publicly caned in the streets of Fulia. Haridas was bound by the court whippers who took him along the market whipping him all the while. The cruel lash of the merciless whipping drew forth streams of blood from Haridas's back. But, behold! The sweet Name of the Beloved welled up again and again from the lips of the saintly victim. He was blissfully unaware of the stinging contact of the cruel whips.

Thus bathed in blood, like a man in dream, Haridas allowed himself to be dragged by the king's servants until, overcome by the exhaustion of the terrible ordeal, he collapsed in a dead faint by the roadside. Thinking him to be dead, the servants took his body before Gorai, who ordered it to be thrown into the river as being unfit for a place in a cemetery.

The cold waters of the sacred river revived the unconscious devotee and the fast-flowing current took him downstream and washed him ashore upon the river steps at Fulia. The news spread everywhere. People flocked to see Haridas. The report reached the ears of Gorai. He was filled with deep regret for his wicked actions, and with chastened heart he hastened to the spot, fell at Haridas's feet, and humbly begged his forgiveness.

Such indeed is the glory of the true devotee that his Satsang transforms not only those that love and revere him, but even those who are his enemies. Even those who intend to harm the devotee become purified, transformed and entirely converted by their association with him. The Bhakta becomes the very embodiment of the redeeming power of the Name. Thus did the persecutors of the saintly Tukaram turn into his most humble devotees in the end. In all such cases, it has invariably proved to be: "He who came to scoff remained to pray!".

Is it ever possible to describe the power and glory of the Divine Name? When one has taken firm refuge in the Name, can any power upon the earth harm him? The Name is indeed an impregnable and unassailable armour ever protecting the devotee from all hostile forces. It gives him mysterious inner strength to endure the worst torment with a smiling countenance. It turns pain into peace and bliss, hatred into love, and sin into virtue.

Now, saint Haridas was living in a cave near Fulia. And even there, the fame of his saintly personality flooded all directions, as the brilliance of the full moon lights up the night. Daily a huge crowd of pilgrims visited his Ashram to have his Darshan. Everyone that came to visit him was immediately afflicted by severe smarting and a burning sensation. This was a great trial to all those that visited Haridas in his cave. Ultimately, it was gathered that this torment was due to the presence of a venomous serpent in the cave. The poisonous vapour emanating from its person caused the burning. Now the devotees all joined together and entreated the saint with great persistence to leave that spot. Haridas was unwilling as the serpent did no harm to him. The devotees again begged him to do so for their sake.

Thereupon Haridas decided that the whole trouble could be set right by taking recourse to the omnipotent Name of the Lord.

Accordingly, the saint arranged a Sankirtan party. The Sankirtan party commenced doing Kirtan with fiery enthusiasm and tremendous Bhav. As the triumphant sound of the thrilling Kirtan began to fill and vibrate in the cave, lo, there came with a fearful hissing sound a huge awesome serpent. Even as the assembly kept gazing at it, it glided out of the place and vanished away never to return again. Thus, through the power of the divine Kirtan, the devotees were once and for all freed of the torment from that day.

Such is the influence of a devotee of the Lord. Even the blue-necked Lord Siva is afraid of the true devotee of the

Lord. Such is the glory of the saint's Nam Sadhan. Hearken the opinion of the Devas in *Srimad Bhagavatam:*

"Who singeth the sweet Name of the Lord, who is dear to the devotees of Him and who serveth all the Lords of the heavenly kingdom, Brahmins, the preceptor and other wise people, certainly that true devotee is worshipful for us. That is to say, we, the Lords, are worshipped by the three universes, but such a devotee is a fit repository of our adoration."

In *Adi Purana*, it is expounded by Sri Krishna to Arjuna:

"Those that are devoted to Me are not yet fully my true Bhaktas, for I verily regard them as my truest Bhaktas who are devoted to my devotees."

See! Haridas ought to have remained at one secluded place and commenced his Sadhana intensely. But he cared for the suffering of all people, .unlike many pseudo-Vedantins of the present day. Haridas was a true devotee of the Lord; for he was devoted unto His devotees.

To cite another instance of Haridas's devotedness unto all: Haridas was singing the Names of the Lord loudly, though such singing was supposed to be inferior to silent repetition. But Haridas was not very concerned about the inferiority of loud chanting. His reply to all was that whereas silent chanting would be beneficial and effective for him alone, his loud repetition would strike the ears of all beings and elevate and save thousands of others besides himself. Such were the divine and humanitarian motives behind every act of Haridas's devotion!

Thus establishing the glory of the Divine Name of the Lord, Saint Haridas became entirely immersed in the fathomless ocean of intense love of God, when he heard that Gauranga had incarnated in Nabadwip and was showering the nectar of Bhakti upon the hearts of all devotees. Haridas too intended to remain with Mahaprabhu. He surrendered himself completely unto the lotus feet of Gauranga, singing the sweet Name of the Lord and dancing in joy and ecstasy. He knew neither day nor night, nor the passage of time. Similar to a thousand suns and moons, his glow of intensified Bhakti set a glorious example for the attainment of the true essence, which is ignored by us due to our lack of good Samskaras. As we verily behold today, every incident in the life of Haridas directs us not only towards the realms of God-realisation, but accompanies us in our path, shows the light of love and purity, removes the obstacles and saves us from snares and pitfalls.

Lo! He on whose tongue the sacred Name of the Lord is ever present, such a man, even though he be the lowest of the low, verily he is pure, and superior even to the highest born. He who sings constantly His glorious Name obtains at once the fruits of all austerities, sacred recitals, sacrifices, meditations and works of merit!

Born though he was to Mohammedan parents, Haridas is truly to be accounted as a gem among Vaishnavites and a brilliant star amidst the galaxy of Hari Bhaktas of this sacred land. Not merely by one's birth, but by the life that one lives is the true worth of a man to be gauged. When once a person has learnt to cling to the Lord's Name, then everything else becomes quite insignificant in his vision. Sacrifice, rituals, Karmas and meditation are all meant to please the Blessed Lord, whereas the Name directly draws down the Lord Himself. For, having the Name is equal to having God Himself, because Nami (holder of the Name) and Nama (the Name) are identical.

Glory to the Bhaktas who themselves were devoted unto the divine feet of the Lord. May their blessings be ever upon us that we may realise their path and destination too!

Saints
of
South India

THIRUVALLUVAR

About two thousand years ago there flourished in Mylapore, Madras, a born Siddha and a born poet by name Valluvar or, as he is more commonly known, 'Thiruvalluvar', which only means, 'the devotee of the Valluva caste'. Valluvas are Pariahs (now called Harijans) and their vocation was proclaiming the orders of the king by beat of drum. There is a tradition that Thiruvalluvar was the son of one Bhagavan, a Brahmin, and Adi, a Pariah woman whom he had married.

Thiruvalluvar was born at Madurai, the capital of the Pandyas. He is regarded as an Avatara of Brahma. His wife Vasuki was a chaste and devoted lady, an ideal wife, who never disobeyed the orders of her husband, but always carried them out implicitly. Thiruvalluvar showed people that a person could lead the life of a Grihastha or householder, and at the same time, lead a divine life or a life of purity and sanctity. He showed people that there was no necessity to leave the family and become a Sannyasin to lead a divine life of purity and sanctity. All his wise sayings and teachings are now in book form and known as '*Thirukkural*'. These sayings are all in couplets. Here are some of them:

> Just as the alphabet 'A' is the beginning of all letters, so also, God is the beginning for this universe.

* * *

> Learn the Shastras completely and then act according to their injunctions.

* * *

> The Anicha flower will fade by smelling, but guests are more sensitive if the hosts turn their faces a bit.

* * *

> Death is like sleeping in the burial ground;
> birth is like waking in the morning.

These couplets are 1,330 in number. They contain the essence of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the six Darshanas.

Thirukkural is regarded as a universal Bible. It is another Gita, Koran or Zend Avesta.

Some aspirants repaired to Thiruvalluvar and enquired: "O sage, which Ashrama of life is better—Grihastha or Sannyasa?". Thiruvalluvar did not give any answer. He simply kept quiet. He wanted to teach them the glory of Grihastha Ashrama by example.

Thiruvalluvar was taking cold rice in the morning. He said to his wife: "Vasuki, the rice is very hot. Bring a fan to cool it". Thiruvalluvar's wife was drawing water from the well when Thiruvalluvar called her. She at once left the rope and ran to him with a fan to cool the rice. She did not say to her husband: "How can the cold rice be hot? Why do you want a fan now?". She simply obeyed his commands. The vessel that contained water was hanging half-way in the well unsupported, on account of her Pativrata Dharma Shakti. The aspirants noticed this phenomenon and the noble conduct of Vasuki and were simply struck with amazement.

About midday, on another occasion, Valluvar called his wife and said, "Bring a lamp immediately, O Vasuki! I am stitching the cloth. I cannot see the eye of the needle. I cannot pass the thread properly". Vasuki did not say to her husband: "It is broad daylight now. Why do you want a lamp? You can see the eye of the needle clearly". But she implicitly obeyed his word. The aspirants were much inspired by the ideal life of sage Thiruvalluvar and the exalted conduct of Vasuki. They did not speak a word to the saint. They took leave of the saint and quietly left the place with profound satisfaction. They were deeply impressed by the practical and exemplary life led by Thiruvalluvar and Vasuki. They learnt the lesson that the life of an ideal householder was in no way inferior to that of an ideal Sannyasin who was treading the path of Nivritti and austerity in the Himalayan caves and that each was great in its own place, time and circumstances.

Dear readers! Such ladies sit enthroned in the hearts of their husbands. No doubt they are hard to find, because such women never advertise themselves; but there must be many in our land of Rishis and sages; and unless we maintain such a high level of moral purity, we will all be going down in these days of modern civilization and scientific advancement. If the husbands of the present day behave like Thiruvalluvar, the wives will say, “My husband has become senseless. He wants to fan the rice when it is so cold! He wants a light when there is broad sunlight”. The wives will rebuke their husbands and fight with them.

That house wherein the wife serves the husband with sincere devotion and observes Pativrata Dharma is heaven on earth. That house wherein the wife fights with the husband and disobeys his orders is a veritable hell on earth. Ladies who practise Pativrata Dharma need not go to temples. They need not practise any Vrata or penance. Service to the husband becomes worship. They can realise God through service to their husbands. Husbands also should be ideal persons with noble qualities. Husbands are the Gurus for their wives. The wives need not get any initiation from any Acharya. Glory to such exalted ladies who practise Pativrata Dharma!

KANAK DAS

The Lord does not look to the caste, creed or colour of a devotee. He looks to the heart of the devotee. He does not judge from external behaviour, but regards the heart, the secret motives and the aspirations of the man. The Harijan community has played a remarkable part in the religious history of India.

Kanak Das was a great devotee of Lord Krishna in Udipi in the district of South Kanara in South India. He was not allowed to enter the temple on account of his low birth. The priests of the temple would not allow him even to come near the main gate of the temple for purpose of worship.

Kanak Das went round the temple and saw a small window at the back of the temple. He seated himself in front of the window. He was soon lost in singing songs in praise of Lord Krishna. Many people gathered round him. They were very much attracted by the sweet melody of his music and the depth of his devotion. Lord Krishna turned round to enable Kanak Das to get His Darshan. The priests were struck with wonder. Even today pilgrims are shown the window and the place where Kanak Das sat and sang. Many people in South Kanara even now sing the soul-elevating songs of Kanak Das and derive strength, joy and peace.

Nandanar, a great devotee of Lord Nataraja of Chidambaram who melted himself in the divine effulgence, was a Harijan. Raidas, the Chamar, was a great saint. He was the Guru of Mira Bai, the queen of Chitore. When the Pundits of Varanasi treated Raidas with great contempt on account of his low birth, Raidas showed his body. The Pundits saw a mysterious luminous thread on his body.

Maranar, the disciple of Alavandar, Thiruvalluvar, the reputed author of *Kural*, Thiruppan Alwar and Chokamela were all Harijan saints. Their messages were universal. They lived in God.

Nabha, who has written a book on the lives of saints called *Bhakta Mala*, was himself a great saint sprung from the lower grades of society.

Glory to the Harijan saints who lived and worked for promoting the happiness of humanity, who propounded the eternal truths, who enriched the religious annals of glorious India, and who still guide us by their teachings and examples and live in our hearts. If you practise in your daily life even a fraction of what they did in their own lifetime, you will soon be transformed into divinities or into glorious supermen or saints.

Hail Kanak Das! Hail Nanda!! Hail Raidas!!!

NILAKANTHA DIKSHITAR

Three hundred years ago an exalted and sagacious personality known as Nilakantha Dikshitar dwelt in South India. He was a born genius, a poet, a picturesque philosopher, an unparalleled devotee, a highly distinguished statesman with a receptive and responsive, subtle and penetrating intellect. He could remember anything even at the first reading.

Nilakantha Dikshitar was the brother of Appayya Dikshitar who was on the peak of intellectual integrity and divine realisation. Appayya wrote volumes on spiritual and philosophical subjects and was even considered as an incarnation of Lord Siva.

The time came for the family partition and Nilakantha was asked by the adorable Appayya Dikshitar to spell out his shares. The wise and discerning Nilakantha implored Appayya for his blessings for wisdom and nothing else. Highly pleased, Appayya blessed him with wisdom no doubt, but material prosperity too followed.

One day, while Nilakantha was delivering lectures on Devi Mahatmya in the orthodox and soul-stirring style of the ancient times, the then puissant ruler, Tirumalai Nayak of the Pandyan Kingdom at Madurai, was bewitched by the boy's depth of wisdom, brilliance and sublimity of speech and made up his mind to make the matchless youth his Prime Minister and Court Pundit.

A condition there was at that time for premiership, which was simple but was an enigma not easy of solution. It eluded the understanding of even the mighty brains. But it was quite simple for Nilakantha. He answered it.

In the very midst of royal splendour and many a pleasure, Nilakantha led the simple life of the pious, the serene life of the philosopher, the austere life of the recluse, the intensely devoted life of the mystic.

Under the direct supervision of Nilakantha, Sundaramurti

Asari, who had reached the acme of perfection in art, chiselled the statue of the queen of Tirumalai Nayak for placing it in the Pandu Mandapam which was under construction then. But, to his misfortune, an undesirable event took place. A thin slice flew away from the right thigh of the queen's statue, making a conspicuous lacuna therein. Again the sculptor tried, but in vain! Nilakantha of comprehensive vision, knowing the mole in the thigh of the queen, told the sculptor, who was perturbed beyond description, to leave the statue as it was.

The king came to know of the whole story. He was clouded by suspicion, deluded by misunderstanding and fury, and with his confused intelligence, commanded the arrest of Nilakantha.

Nilakantha at that time was waving camphor Arati to the Mother of the Universe, Meenakshi, whose staunch Upasaka he was. By the grace of the Mother and through intuitive perception, he knew of the storm raised in the mind of the king and of his command. He added some more camphor to the light and applied it to his eyes and left them blind.

The king heard of this tragic incident and came to his senses. Drowned in the ocean of repentance and remorse, the king ran to the crystal pure Nilakantha to beg pardon of him. Nilakantha of all-compassion, tender feelings and inimitable devotion poured out his heart to the Mother in a hundred and five verses for the restoration of his eyesight and to save the king from remorse.

From that day Nilakantha cut off the bonds that bound him to the Royal Court. Tirumalai Nayak, the ruler, honoured him by presenting the Jagir of Palamadai, four miles from Tirunelveli.

In his last days, the devotion-intoxicated Nilakantha, who was a glorious saint and sage, wrote several inspired works which were natural and spontaneous, sublime and elevating, scholarly and vibrant with feeling. He took Sannyasa and entered into Samadhi.

PURANDARA DAS

Purandara Das was a great poet and saint of Karnataka. He was a great musician as well. He heard the music of the soul inside and so he gave his thrilling music outside.

Purandara Das is a saint who belongs to the whole of India. He stands on a par with the great saints of other States like Kabir, Surdas, Gauranga, Tukaram and Tyagaraja.

Purandara Das lived during the glorious days of the Karnatic Empire of Vijayanagar in the sixteenth century. What Gauranga is to Bengal, Tukaram to Maharashtra, Mira Bai to Marwar, Tulsidas to Uttar Pradesh, Tyagaraja to Tamil Nadu, Purandara Das is to Karnataka.

Gauranga, Vallabhacharya and Purandara Das were contemporaries. Purandara Das worshipped Lord Vittala, the presiding Deity in the famous pilgrim centre of Pandharpur in Maharashtra.

Purandara Das was born in a rich Brahmin family in 1484 A.D. at Purandhargarh, a town about fifteen miles from the modern city of Pune. He was known by the name Srinivasa Naik before he became a devotee of Sri Krishna. He married Saraswati Bai, a pious and rich lady. He had intense love for music and cultivated that art to a great proficiency. He led a very luxurious life. He carried on a jeweller's business and a money-lending business. He was known as 'Nava-Koti Narayana' on account of his extreme wealth.

Although Srinivasa Naik was a rich man, he was a great miser. He never spent a pie on charity. He would never feed Brahmins, Sannyasins and poor people. The pious, God-fearing Saraswati, Naik's wife, was greatly grieved at heart on account of the materialistic, impious nature of her husband.

One day, an old Brahmin who wanted to perform the thread-ceremony of his son approached Purandara Das and begged for some money. Saraswati told the Brahmin that she had no money of her own. But the old Brahmin told the woman that the diamond nose-ring she was wearing was given to her by her parents and she could dispose it of according to her own wishes. Saraswati gladly gave the nose-ring to the Brahmin.

The Brahmin gave the nose-ring to Srinivasa Naik and asked for a loan on its security. The Naik at once found out that it was his wife's nose-ring, but the Brahmin bluntly refused to answer questions. He left the shop saying that he would return shortly for his money.

The Naik put the nose-ring in his iron-safe and immediately ran to his house. He asked Saraswati to bring her nose-ring. Saraswati was in a great dilemma. She thought that her husband would rebuke and chastise her severely. So she wanted to commit suicide by taking poison. As she was about to drink the poison, she felt something falling into the cup. She removed it and found to her great surprise that it was her own nose-ring which she had given in charity to the old Brahmin. She thanked the Lord for His benign mercy and grace and gave the nose-ring to her husband.

The Naik was struck with great amazement when he saw the nose-ring. He immediately went back to the shop. He did not find the jewel in the iron-safe. He asked his wife to narrate the whole story about the nose-ring. Saraswati said all that had happened. Naik realised that the old Brahmin who never turned up later was none but God Himself, who had come to test and teach him. This incident changed him completely. His intense attachment to money vanished. The spirit of renunciation filled his heart. He gave away all his property in charity and left his home immediately. He went to Vijayanagar, the capital of the Karnatic Empire on the bank of the Tungabhadra.

Krishnadeva Raja was the then illustrious Emperor of Karnataka. Vyasaraja, a great scholar and mystic, was the patron-saint of the empire. Naik became a disciple of Vyasaraja. He spent the next forty years in the dissemination of Bhakti all over the land through his songs. He died at the age of eighty at Vijayanagar in 1564 A.D.

Purandara Das is regarded as an Avatara of Narada Rishi. He is considered as the father of the Carnatic system of music.

He had profound knowledge of Raga and Tala. His contributions to Carnatic Sahitya are indeed very great. His literary style is exquisite.

Purandara Das combined in himself command of language, beauty of expression, poetic genius, vast learning and scholarship of ancient writings in Sanskrit. In addition, he had a sound knowledge of music in respect of both harmony and rhythm. He was familiar with Natya or rhythmic movements with expressive Bhavas. Above all, he had Aparokshanubhuti or realisation of the Self.

Purandara Das initiated a line of saints which, for centuries, has spread the spiritual message throughout Karnataka.

Purandara Das regarded God as the Lord of Lakshmi and he sacrificed all his wealth for the sake of God. By giving away his material wealth, he got the wealth of spirituality. That spiritual treasure has been handed down from generation to generation. It has always increased, but not decreased.

Purandara Das sings:

In youth I was proud and ignorant.
There is no limit to my desire,
My desire for women is still unquenched.
Not once have I remembered You, O God.
Make me Thy servant
And give me peace of mind.
Forgive my sins,
As a mother forgives her children.

In riches Thou art the husband of Lakshmi,
The bestower of riches.
Thou art the first Guru,
Thou art the Lord of earth.
In purity, Thou art the Creator
Of the Ganges, who purifies all.

O Lord! Thou art the protector of the helpless.
I am full of defects
And yet You have not picked holes in me;
You have forgiven me
And shown great compassion on me.

I am without knowledge and capacities
And yet You have shown grace on me.

How can I please You by worship, O Lord!
Shall I try and worship You with flowers?
You have in Your own navel the lotus;
Shall I wave some lights before You?
Your very eyes, Sun and Moon,
Are lighting up the whole world;
Shall I make an offering in gold?
Your wife is Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth;
Shall I wash Your feet with holy water?
The very Ganges is water that started
From Your feet.
So, Purandara Vittala!
What can I offer You?
Give me remembrance of Your Name always.

THAYUMANAVAR

About two hundred and thirty years ago, there lived a Vaisya by name Ketilya Pillai in the town of Vedaranyam in the district of Thanjavur in South India. He was a very learned and pious man. He was the manager of a Siva temple. The Raja of Tiruchirapalli, Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Chokkalinga Nayak, having heard of the talents, learning and virtuous qualities of Ketilya Pillai, appointed him as the manager of his estate. Ketilya Pillai had one son, by name Chidambaram Pillai. The elder brother of Ketilya Pillai adopted Chidambaram Pillai as his son. Ketilya Pillai used to visit the Thayumaneswar temple in Tiruchirapalli daily and offer prayers for getting a son. The Almighty blessed him with a son. As this son was born by the grace of Thayumaneswar, Ketilya Pillai gave him the name of the Lord.

This boy Thayumanavar was very intelligent. He learnt very quickly the Upanishads, the Puranas, the Ithihasas, grammar, etc. He became a scholar of great erudition. After his father's death, at the request of the Raja of Tiruchirapalli, he occupied the position of his father as the manager of the estate at the age of fourteen. Thayumanavar was an extremely handsome boy. His hands were so long as to touch the knees, a characteristic which is considered among the Hindus as a mark of greatness. Thayumanavar was a seeker after Truth. He defeated the Pundits who attended the court of the Raja. He sent them away with the remark: "Find out the Truth". The Raja was very much pleased with Thayumanavar.

Thayumanavar was deeply engrossed in the idea, "When can I have a teacher who can remove my doubts and impart Jnana?". At that time, Mounaguru Swami, a descendant of Thirumula Nayanar, came to Tiruchirapalli to have Darshan of Thayumaneswar. Boy Thayumanavar's heart was drawn towards Mounaguru Swami. He prostrated before him and followed him like a shadow. He had long debates and conversations with Mounaguru on various knotty points of Advaita philosophy. Thayumanavar developed intense Vairagya and forgot all about his official duties. Then the Raja relieved him of his duties and himself became a disciple of Thayumanavar.

Thayumanavar married just to please his Guru and his elder brother, though he had not the slightest inclination to marry. He had a son by name Kanagasabhapati Pillai. After his wife's death, obeying the order of his Guru, he became a Sannyasin. Thayumanavar left the house with a Kaupin only. He practised Yoga and spent all his time in meditation and Samadhi. He got inspiration and Sakshatkara. He sang many inspired songs. All his songs were collected in book form by his disciple Arulayar. He initiated Arulayar into the mysteries of Jnana. He then went to Ramanathapuram. He entered the pure Nirvikalpa Samadhi.

Thayumanavar Swami's songs of realisation are sung by everybody throughout South India. They contain elevating, soul-stirring, sublime thoughts and are wonderful. They are pregnant with subtle, philosophical thoughts and penetrate deep into the heart of the hearers.

Thayumanavar was an embodiment of the Vedas. He was a living assurance for God-realisation. He never preached on platforms. He was a perfect Jnani who was one with Brahman through his essential nature, and being absorbed in the qualified God, the Saguna-Apara Brahman of Sankara, he possessed all the eight divine attributes. As a Jnani, he worked in all the bodies, he worked with the very breath of Nature, he worked along with the wind that blew, with the rain that dropped from heaven and with the sunshine. If a Jnani elevates ten persons by removing their Avidya—the root cause of all evils—that is real Loka-sangraha. Social and political work concerns not a Jnani or a real Sannyasin.

The life and teachings of Thayumanavar Swami appeared in five parts in the *Gyana Bodhini*, Madras. Thayumanavar's songs are on gramophone records.

YOGI MUKUND RAI

Yogi Mukund Rai was an extraordinary man who lived some seven hundred years ago at Vijayanagaram in South India. This information is found in the old records of the palace of Vijayanagaram. Jayapal, the then Raja of Vijayanagaram, used to ask every Mahatma or Sannyasin who came to his Durbar: "Show me Brahman". If the Mahatma failed to satisfy him, the Raja would put him to manual labour, digging a tank. Hundreds of Sadhus were thus engaged in this digging work as they were not able to show Brahman to the Raja.

Yogi Mukund Rai also came to the Durbar singing the names of the Lord: "*Narayana, Jaya Narayana, Jaya Jaya Narayana*". The Sepoy at the gate told him not to enter the Durbar, for he also would be put on the digging work. But Yogi Mukund Rai said that he would not mind the digging work if he could only see the Raja. The Raja put the usual question to him. Mukund Rai said, "Yes, I can surely show you Brahman. Bring a horse". Then he asked the Raja to mount the horse. The Raja mounted, and while he was in a standing position, with the left leg in the stirrup and the other leg unsupported before crossing it over to the other side of the horse, the Yogi severely whipped the horse. Then and there the Raja entered into Samadhi for seven days and nights continuously, the horse standing quietly all that time. On the eighth day the Raja came down from his Samadhi. He prostrated before the Yogi and said, "O venerable sir, O my Guru! I am thy disciple and servant ready to do any and every kind of service". The Yogi replied, "I do not want anything. Release all these Sadhus from this digging work. In future, do not trouble the Sadhus in this manner".

Yogi Mukund Rai wrote for the Raja two books on Vedanta called *Premamrita* and *Vichara-Sindhu*, both of which are extant and available now. These books are for study and deep meditation.

PARAMAHAMSA TAILANG SWAMI

Paramahamsa Tailang Swami came of a Brahmin family of Holia, in the district of Vishakapatnam in Andhra Pradesh. His father Nrisinghadhar was a very charitable gentleman who was famous for his learning. Nrisinghadhar lived a pious life with his wife, but for a long time had no children. He therefore married another wife. But this event gave bitter agony to the delicate heart of his first wife, who thereupon set on an Anushthana and prayed to God Siva for a child. Happily she was blessed with a son, in due course, and he was named Shivaram. When Shivaram was barely five years old, his father died. He was sent to a learned man of the place to learn the Vedas and the Shastras. After his mother's death, Shivaram changed his life and renounced the world. He then went on long journeys to the various sacred places of India. This kind of pilgrimage was a well-known item in the mediaeval scheme of culture and spiritual education. While wandering from one place to another, he met with a sage, whose personality so impressed him that Shivaram at once became his disciple and travelled with him widely throughout India. He learnt from the sage the elementary principles of the various Yogas and mystic and contemplative practices. Since then he came to be known as Ganapathi Swami or Tailang Swami.

After his Guru's death, Tailang Swami went to Rameswaram, where he gathered and trained a large number of disciples of all castes. It so happened that on a certain occasion he restored a dead man to life and exhibited many astrological miracles to the people. This made him famous in the city and therefore people flocked to him in large numbers and troubled him with many unnecessary questions. Being obliged to suspend his Yogic studies owing to this harassment, he left Rameswaram and went to Nepal. There too people did not leave him alone. Therefrom he marched straight off to Tibet and completed his studies of the Yogas, according to his desire, at Manasarovar. After gaining complete mastery over the Yogas, he came down to Varanasi, where he lived to the last day of his life. Since his arrival in Varanasi, he spoke to none save his disciples. Whatever he was offered by his disciples he ate and whatever he was given by them he drank. He did neither ask for anything nor decline anything that was offered to him. In short, he became a Paramahamsa, in the strictest sense of the term.

Once Tailang Swami caught hold of the sword of the governor and threw it into the Ganges. When the governor demanded it, he dived into the water and brought back two swords and the governor was unable to spot out his own sword.

Some mischief-makers poured some lime water into the mouth of Tailang Swami. Tailang Swami at once ejected it out through the anus by Sang Pachar Kriya.

Paramahamsa Tailang Swami is credited with having lived for about two hundred and eighty years. He was a catholic-spirited saint. Ascetic to the core, full of simplicity and restraint, he also had overflowing love and the emotional spiritualism of the new epoch. As a saint, he was notable for his great kindness of heart, charity and liberal-mindedness. He took under his shelter disciples of all castes and creeds, low-born ordinary men, and even ignorant ones, and with the genius and kindness of a typical Guru, taught them the love of God and service of fellowmen.

The chief gift of the Swamiji to humanity is his great work on religious philosophy entitled *Mahavakya Ratnavali.*

PATTINATHU PILLAYAR

It is believed that Kubera himself incarnated as Pattinathu Pillayar in Kaveripoompattinam in the Chola kingdom—the modern district of Thanjavur and its neighbourhood. Pattinathu Pillayar was very wealthy; his another name was Thiruvenkadavar. He married Sivakala. He had no children. Meanwhile, Sarumar and Sushila, a Brahmin couple, who were good devotees of Lord Siva, were worried over their poverty. To them Lord Siva appeared in a dream and He advised them to go to the temple the next day and said that there they would find a baby. The Lord further told them to take the baby to Thiruvenkadavar and get plenty of money. Accordingly, the next day, Sarumar and his wife took the baby to Thiruvenkadavar and got plenty of money in return. The child's name was Maruthappiran. The child was duly brought up by Thiruvenkadavar and his wife as their own son.

One day, when Maruthappiran was sixteen years old, he asked permission of Thiruvenkadavar to go overseas for trading. Though the latter was unwilling to let his son go, he gave permission with a heavy heart. After sometime, Maruthappiran returned home after exchanging all his property for a few cow-dung pieces and sand. While nearing home, he gave a box to one of the servants to be given to his father and disappeared. His father was much disappointed to see the foolishness of his son in bringing cow-dung and sand. On breaking one of the cow-dung cakes, it was found to contain an invaluable diamond and the sand turned into gold. On opening the box, Thiruvenkadavar found nothing but a piece of paper and some broken needles. The paper contained the following inscription: "Even these broken old needles will not follow you". At once Jnana dawned in Thiruvenkadavar. He came to understand that the child was no other than the Lord Siva Himself. He then ordered his chief officer Sendanar to throw away all his wealth. He entered the order of Sannyasa and lived on alms as a Bhikshu in the same town in which he previously lived. This state of affairs pained the hearts of his relatives. His sister was so much grieved that she even thought that it would be better for her brother to die than live as a beggar. She wanted to poison him. She mixed some poison with some sweetmeat and gave it to her brother. Pattinathu Pillayar said, "Every man's evils burn that man. Even so, let this sweetmeat burn this house". He threw the poisoned cake over the roof of the house of his sister, and lo, the whole house was reduced to ashes.

A little later Pattinathu Pillayar's mother died. Pattinathu Pillayar burnt her with plantain stems. Through his powers of knowledge the plantain stems caught fire. He went to Thiruvidaimaruthur and then to Thiruvallur. He restored the life of a dead man. He visited all the Siva temples in Kongu Nadu. Then he went to Thuluva Nadu. Afterwards he visited the famous Siva temples of Chidambaram and Kalahasti. There he sang many inspiring Stotras on Siva.

Pattinathu Pillayar visited the town belonging to Bhadragiri Maharaja and there he entered into Jnana-Nishtha in a Ganesh temple. That night some thieves plundered the Maharaja's palace and on the way offered a necklace studded with diamonds to Lord Ganesha. As Pattinathu Pillayar was sitting close to the image of Lord Ganesha, the necklace fell round his neck. In the morning, police officers came and saw the ornament round the neck of this Sannyasin. They took him for the thief and brought him before the Maharaja. The Maharaja ordered him to be hanged. The Swami was brought to the hanging post. He was smiling all the while. He sang a song to Siva: "Nothing is done by me. Even an atom will not move without Thee. I have not done any evil action after I took this body. The evil actions of my previous birth only have brought me to this state." At once the hanging post caught fire. The servants reported this strange news to the Maharaja. The Maharaja was struck with panic and wonder. He ran barefooted to the Swami and prostrated at his feet. The Swami found that the Maharaja was a proper aspirant for knowledge and ordered him to go to Thiruvidaimaruthur.

Pattinathu Pillayar used to sit for meditation near the eastern gate of the temple of Thiruvidaimaruthur. Bhadragiri

Maharaja used to sit near the western gate of the temple after getting Bhiksha and serving his Guru. One day, a small hungry bitch came to Bhadragiri and waved its tail. Bhadragiri pitied the dog and gave it the remaining portion of his alms. Thus the bitch remained with him for some days. Lord Siva, knowing this, went to Pattinathu Pillayar, and pretending to be very hungry, begged for alms. Pattinathu Pillayar said, "I am a Sannyasin with Kaupin only. There is a Samsari (householder) at the western gate. Go to him and you will get Bhiksha". Lord Siva came to Bhadragiri and told him what Pattinathu Pillayar had said. Bhadragiri was very much vexed and said, "This bowl and this dog only have made me a householder". He threw the bowl, in great disgust, and it fell on the head of the dog. The dog died on the spot. Lord Siva disappeared.

The dog was later born as the daughter of the Raja of Kashi. When the girl reached the marriageable age, the Raja asked the priests to arrange for her marriage. The daughter said, "I am not destined for marriage. My Guru is doing meditation at the western gate of the Siva temple at Thiruvidaimaruthur. Send me over there to my Guru". Then the Raja brought her to Bhadragiri. Bhadragiri came down from his Yoga Samadhi, and saw, through his Yogic vision, that the dog had come again in the form of this girl. He took her by the hand and brought her to his Guru Pattinathu Pillayar. "Can the dog which ate the remaining portion of my alms attain the birth of a girl?" asked Bhadragiri. Pattinathu Pillayar replied, "It is all His will" and then prayed to Lord Siva. Then a big blazing light appeared. In that light the girl and Bhadragiri disappeared. The light also vanished.

Pattinathu Pillayar came at last to Thiruvottiyur, twelve miles from Madras, and there he played with the shepherd boys singing the following song which describes the vanity of human life and egoism:

"Keechu Keechu Ambalam,
Keeya Keeya Ambalam,
Machu Machu Ambalam,
Maya Maya Ambalam."

As soon as a child is born, he cries out "*Keechu, Keechu*". As the child grows up into manhood with university degrees and position, he runs about hither and thither with vanity and egoism. This is "*Keeya, Keeya*". Then he becomes an old man with grey hairs and tottering steps. This is "*Machu, Machu*". Then he expires. This is "*Maya, Maya*". But he does not know THAT "*Ambalam*", the Chidakasa, the Absolute or the Para Brahman.

Pattinathu Pillayar then assumed the form of a Sivalingam in Thiruvottiyur. At the present moment, there is a temple there which is frequented always by pilgrims. Pattinathu Pillayar is revered in the south as one of the most distinguished saints that South India has ever produced. His songs are very inspiring. They produce Vairagya immediately in the mind of the readers.

TYAGARAJA

Tyagaraja Swami was a South Indian Telugu Brahmin. He was the son of Rama Brahmam. Panchapakesan and Ramanathan were his brothers. Tyagaraja had only a daughter, named Seethalakshmi, who had a son Tyagaraja, named after the grandfather.

Tyagaraja Swami was a great musician-saint of South India. He was the father of South Indian music. He was a devotee of Lord Rama. Most of his devotional songs are in praise of Lord Rama. They are highly inspiring and soul-elevating.

Tyagaraja Swami is said to have composed twenty-four thousand Kirtans or songs in praise of Lord Rama. Most of his songs are in Telugu and a few are in Sanskrit. Only about five hundred of his songs are sung by the songsters of the present day. When devotional songs are sung with piety and devotion, they at once elevate the soul to magnanimous spiritual heights and melt the mind in the Lord and lead to communion and Bhava Samadhi.

Tyagaraja used to sing in the temple of Ambal at Thiruvaiyaru and worship the Devi before he proceeded for his daily Bhiksha. He adopted the *Uncha Vritti* profession and lived on Bhiksha, though he was well-known throughout South India and many Maharajas were willing to have him as the Durbar songster.

Tyagaraja Swami was a superman. He had direct Darshan of Lord Rama on several occasions. The Vigrahams or the idols that he worshipped were thrown into the river. Tyagaraja received directions in his dream from Lord Rama and located the exact spot in the river where the Vigrahams lay buried underneath the sand, after one year.

The then Raja of Pudukkottai once tested the merits of the songsters in a strange way. He placed an unlit lamp amongst them. He challenged the experts to light the lamp with a song only without using a match or any other means. Tyagaraja Swami meditated upon Narada for a while, sang the Raga Jyotisvarupini, and the lamp lighted of itself. All were struck with wonder.

Tyagaraja Swami restored to life a person who was accidentally drowned in a temple well while returning from a pilgrimage to Tirupathi. He had the knowledge of the correct day and hour of the passing away of his soul from the physical body. Divine Rishi Narada gave him the book named *Swararnavam* for propagating high-class music.

Tyagaraja never cared for wealth or position in society. He was humble. He courted poverty. Once, King Saraboji, the Raja of Thanjavur, sent a message to Tyagaraja. The messenger said, "Kindly compose a song or two in praise of the Raja and he will give you ten acres of land and a big bag of gold". Tyagaraja replied, "Why should I use my music for flattering Rajas who lead a vicious life? Fie upon that cursed gold which goads people to indulge in vices and run after sensual enjoyments". He sang a song in Kalyani, "*Nidhi Chala Sukhama*". The meaning of the song is: "Which gives greater happiness—gold or worship of Lord Rama? O soul! Speak the truth. Which is sweeter and more delicious—milk, butter and curd or the essence of the nectar of meditation and Bhajana of Rama? Which is more conducive to health—a dip in the Ganga of serenity of mind or in the muddy well of corruption? Which of the two is better—praise of a rich man who is puffed up with vanity or a song in praise of the all-merciful, omnipotent Lord?". The messenger did not speak a word. He left the place silently.

The then Maharaja of Travancore sent a messenger to fetch Tyagaraja at any cost. The messenger tempted Tyagaraja that the Maharaja would give him much wealth and a good position. Tyagaraja replied, "I regard wealth as an obstacle to man's progress. It does not contribute any happiness to man. On the contrary, it brings all sorts of miseries. Only fools run after money". He then explained to the messenger the meaning of his song "*Padavi Ni Sadbhakti*" in Sakalabhairavi Raga: "That state of mind which places implicit faith in Rama is the real position in life. There are many who can repeat all the

Vedas, Shastras and Upanishads like a parrot, but who do not live in the spirit of their teachings. Can such persons be regarded as having attained the real position? There are many persons who possess a mountain of wealth, a number of wives and children, and who enjoy the friendship of Maharajas. Can they be considered to have attained the real position? Can a person who holds a so-called good status in society, but who leads a life of evil passions and dire ignorance, be regarded as having attained the real position? No, no. Only that man who has implicit faith in Rama, who meditates on the Lord, and who has obtained His grace has attained the real position". The messenger went away quietly.

What a magnanimous soul was Tyagaraja! He spurned riches and position. The wealth of the three worlds is mere straw for a man who enjoys the wealth and bliss of God-realisation. The state of such exalted souls is beyond description.

Tyagaraja Swami's Samadhi is at Thiruvaiyaru on the banks of the Cauvery, about seven miles from the town of Thanjavur. All the songsters of South India assemble there and celebrate his anniversary with great eclat every year in the month of January. In 1942 January, his 95th anniversary was celebrated.

Glory to Tyagaraja Swami whose songs instil devotion, joy and happiness in the heart of the hearers.

NANDANAR

Nandanar belonged to the depressed class of South India. He was a Pariah saint. He was an embodiment of humility, patience and sincerity. He was a great devotee of Lord Nataraja of Chidambaram. Chidambaram is known as the Southern Kashi. It has a big temple. 'Nataraja' is another name for Lord Siva who is worshipped in this temple. If you remain in Chidambaram for some time, your sins will be destroyed. This is a popular belief.

Nandanar was serving a Brahmin in the cultivation of lands. When Nandanar asked his master for permission to go to Chidambaram for Darshan of Lord Siva, the arrogant Brahmin landlord abused him and said, "You low-caste Pariah! You want to worship the Deity of the Brahmins?! Go and worship the ghosts, the Bhutas—your family deities". Nandanar was a great devotee of Lord Nataraja. He was always praying with devotion. On the incessant request of Nandanar, the Brahmin landlord told him: "Yes, you can go to Chidambaram, if you finish planting paddy in 250 acres of the farm in time". Nandanar was in great despair. He wanted to attend the yearly festival at Chidambaram. He had to finish the work within two days. He cursed himself and prayed the whole night for Lord Nataraja's grace and guidance. Lord Nataraja did a miracle to help His Bhakta. The next morning, the entire plot of land of 250 acres was green with paddy plants, with ears just shooting up. The Brahmin was quite astonished. He thought that Nandanar must be a great devotee. He immediately allowed him to go to Chidambaram.

Nandanar was thus able to go to Chidambaram. Here he had to face another trouble. The Brahmin temple priests, the *Dikshitars*, would not allow Nandanar to enter the temple as he was of low birth. Lord Nataraja appeared to them in their dream and said, "O priests, perform all the necessary purificatory ceremonies for Nandanar. He is My great devotee. Allow him to worship Me inside the temple".

The Brahmins performed the ceremonies accordingly and allowed Nandanar to enter the inner shrine. Nandanar went into the inner shrine and worshipped Nataraja and was in the height of divine ecstasy. A dazzling, effulgent light was seen. Nandanar disappeared. He was nowhere to be seen. He became one with Lord Nataraja.

God makes no difference between a high-caste Brahmin and a low-caste Pariah. What He wants is sincere devotion. Nandanar was more dear to Him than the Brahmin temple-priests. In the realm of Bhakti, there is no distinction of caste, creed or colour. He who has devotion is dear to the Lord.

BHADRACHALAM RAMDAS

Bhakta Ramdas of Bhadrachalam, an ardent devotee of Sri Rama and a contemporary of Bhakta Kabir, was the Tahsildar of Bhadrachalam, Hyderabad State, Deccan.

Gopanna, as Ramdas was known, was the son of Linganna, an orthodox Vaishnavite Andhra Brahmin. Linganna was a devotee of Lord Rama and was very popular in his locality. The then ruler of Hyderabad was Tanisha, the Nizam, who like Akbar, the Great Moghul, ruled over his State with extreme religious tolerance. He had his ministers, Akkanna and Madanna by name, who also belonged to the same orthodox Brahmin family of Linganna.

This Tanisha of Hyderabad State, in his previous birth, was a poor Brahmin at Varanasi. Hunger-stricken, this poor Brahmin was roaming in the streets of Varanasi and worshipping Lord Siva with great devotion and offering Abhisheka for a number of years. As the Lord did not give him Darshan, the Brahmin got angry and threw the pot on the idol of Siva. Instantly Lord Siva appeared before him and told him that for his steadfast devotion he would be born as a prince in the next birth and that his anger had prevented his attaining salvation. Lord Siva told him further that in his next birth as a ruler, Ramdas would have Darshan of the Lord as Sri Rama and be purified.

Bhadrachalam, which was under the jurisdiction of the Nizam, is famous as a pilgrim centre with the holy temple of Sri Rama, Lakshmana, Sita and Hanuman. Though during the middle ages it was in a good condition, it slowly became dilapidated. Thus, the temple originally built by the Pallavas was in a ruined condition after the era of Muslim invasion.

Gopanna married Kamalamma when he was young and lived with her at Golakondapalle doing Kirtan and Bhajan of the Lord's Name. One day Kabir Das met our Gopanna, and realising his extreme devotion to Lord Rama, initiated him and imparted unto him the Taraka Mantra of Lord Rama:

"Sri Rama Rama Ramethi Rame Raame Manorame
Sahasra Nama Thaththulyam Rama Nama Varanane"

Since that time, Gopanna devoted himself intensely towards the worship of the Lord with the Mantra heard from Kabir. Both husband and wife spent their life daily in Nama Smaran, Kirtan and holding Bhajan of the Lord's Name. By this they won the goodwill of the local people who began to pay great respect and reverence to Gopanna and his family. Gopanna spent, towards this divine cause of dissemination of spiritual knowledge, more than his income.

One day, while they were celebrating with great eclat the tenth day of the *Sri Rama Navami* festival, Gopanna's child fell into the tub wherein hot rice-water had been poured; and it died. Kamalamma ran to the spot, took the dead child and wound it in a mat without the knowledge of either Gopanna or the others. Her attempts to control her excessive grief failed and she broke into tears when Gopanna went inside the house after the meals was over. Placing the dead child before the idol of Sri Rama, Gopanna prayed unto Him. To the great surprise of the visitors and the parents, the dead child came back to life as if from deep sleep.

The devotion of Ramdas grew and he was more anxious to have the Darshan of Lord Rama in that very birth. He approached Kabir, who told him that the Lord would give His Darshan the night following. On hearing this, Ramdas came to his house, beautifully decorated the room for the Lord to enter and was keeping vigil the whole night. After midnight, a buffalo came rushing into that room and soiled the silken clothes and made the room ugly and dirty by the mire on its body. Enraged at the behaviour of that buffalo, Gopanna gave it severe blows and drove it away. The next day he went to Kabir Das and narrated the incident that had taken place the previous night. Kabir told Gopanna that he had missed the valuable opportunity, for the buffalo that had come into the room was none other than the Lord Himself. Gopanna repented very much for his conduct. Kabir also told Gopanna that as a penance for the foolish act he had done, he should perform Parikrama of the Bhadrachalam temple daily. And Gopanna, true to the words of his Guru, settled at Bhadrachalam with his wife and commenced doing Parikrama.

While Gopanna was thus leading a life of peace and joy, wet with devotion, his income grew less and he was forced to seek some livelihood to maintain his family. Urged by this shortage of income, he made his way to Akkanna and Madanna, his uncles in Hyderabad, with the hope of getting an employment in the State. His hopes were fulfilled and Tanisha himself was much pleased to offer him the appointment of Tahsildar of Bhadrachalam. Getting the order of appointment as Tahsildar, Gopanna returned to his place and commenced to execute his duties to the fullest satisfaction of the Nizam and the extreme delight of the local public. His impartial judgements and his regularity in remitting the revenue to the treasury not only won the heart of the Tanisha, but also the high esteem of the public. But Gopanna's devotion to duty in no way interfered with his intense devotion to Lord Rama.

One day, Gopanna was so much impressed by the ruined state of the temple of Bhadrachalam that he decided within himself to utilise even the revenue of the State for the work of reconstruction. Impelled by that desire, he called for an estimate for remodelling and reconstructing the temple with sculptural designs. The estimate came to about eight lakh Varahas. To his surprise, Gopanna found that the treasury had more than the required sum. Come what may, Gopanna decided to utilise every pie left in the treasury to rebuild the temple, purchase new jewels for the Deities and perform the Kumbhabhisheka ceremony on a grand scale. With the cooperation of earnest and enthusiastic workers, the work of reconstruction of the temple was finished in record time. Gopanna then celebrated the Kumbhabhishekam on a grand scale. When everything was over, he saw the treasury empty, and as he had foreseen, he could not remit the revenue for that year. Naturally, Bhadrachalam jurisdiction fell into heavy arrears of about seven and a half lakh Varahas. In spite of his uncles being ministers, they could not offer any help to Gopanna when Tanisha demanded the remittance of the amount instantaneously. Failing that, Tanisha ordered Gopanna to suffer rigorous imprisonment until the time he refunded the amount due to the State. Gopanna was made a prisoner and thrown into jail.

For twelve years Gopanna was shut up in prison, undergoing unbearable hardships at the hands of the cruel jailors who whipped him, starved him and inflicted upon him all sorts of punishment except death.

Unable to bear the torture and hardships of prison life, Gopanna decided to cast away his mortal existence by taking poison. One day, keeping a cup of poison by his side, he began to pray to Lord Rama. In the meanwhile, Lord Rama, realising the extreme hardships that Gopanna had undergone during the twelve years, came along with Lakshmana to Tanisha's private chamber at midnight in the guise of Sepoys of the Tahsildar of Bhadrachalam. Taken aback by the sudden appearance of the two Sepoys, Tanisha asked his wife to retire to another chamber and asked the Sepoys who they were and why they had made that sudden appearance at that hour. Ramachandraji gave the reply that he was known as Ram Singh and the other as Lakshman Singh and that they were the Sepoys of the Tahsildar of Bhadrachalam and that they had come to repay the arrears amount which was due to the State and for the sake of which Gopanna had been suffering so long in prison. And they demanded the immediate release of Gopanna.

After answering all the queries made by Tanisha, Ramachandraji poured down the gold Moharrahs which were worth more than what Gopanna had to give to the State. In token of having received all the arrears, Ramachandraji gave the Tanisha a prepared official receipt which he was having and he also gave him a pen to sign and the official seal to affix on the paper. For want of ink, and at the instigation of Sri Rama, Tanisha dipped the pen into the spit Thambulam remnants in his vessel and signed the receipt. Getting the receipt for the arrears, and asking Tanisha to release Gopanna immediately from prison, both Ram Singh and Lakshman Singh disappeared that night after giving the signed receipt to Gopanna in the prison. The next morning, Tanisha, repenting for all he had done unto Gopanna, begged his pardon, released him from prison and received him with all honour and respect and requested him to show the divine messengers who had suddenly appeared in his private chamber the night before. To the great joy of the people of Bhadrachalam, the same post of Tahsildar was offered to Gopanna and Gopanna was reinstated in the post permanently by the orders of the State. With glory and pomp, and to the great joy of the people and the Tanisha and his family, Gopanna returned to Bhadrachalam and resumed his duties as Tahsildar.

One day, while he was praying in the temple, to the joy of all assembled there, Gopanna, by a Voice Divine, was made known to the world as *Bhakta Ramdas*. After some years of happiness, peace and plenty, Ramdas, the Tahsildar-saint of Bhadrachalam reached the supreme abode of eternal peace. After him, his wife and Tanisha, being the recipients of the blessing of Lord Rama, attained everlasting peace.

Bhadrachalam Ramdas had been a Brahmin in his previous birth. In that birth, he had brought up a pet parrot. He had kept that parrot in a cage and never let it out. He had trained the parrot to chant *Ram Nam*. For having imprisoned the parrot, Ramdas had to undergo suffering in prison for twelve years. This secret of his previous birth was revealed to him by Kabir Das, when Ramdas went to him and asked why he, in spite of being a Bhakta of Lord Rama, had to suffer so much.

VILWAMANGAL

Vilwamangal was the son of a pious Brahmin named Ram Das who lived in a small village on the banks of the river Krishnaveni in South India. Ram Das gave Vilwamangal religious instructions and made him study scriptures. Ram Das died when Vilwamangal was very young. As there was none to check Vilwamangal, he developed many vicious habits. He had bad companions. He inherited his father's estate.

One day Vilwamangal attended a nautch party along with his friends. He was enamoured of the beauty of the dancing girl Chintamani. He gave all his property to her and became actually her slave.

Vilwamangal was performing the Sraddha ceremony on the death anniversary of his father. Even on that day his whole heart was on Chintamani only. He could not bear her separation even for a second. He did the ceremony somehow in a desultory, half-hearted manner, without any attention or devotion. He wanted to visit Chintamani on that sacred day also. He had to cross a river. It was already dark. There was storm, rain, thunder and lightning. Vilwamangal did not mind anything. He was bent upon meeting the dancing girl at any cost. He approached the boatman who gave a flat refusal. Then he jumped into the river headlong. Fortunately he came across a female dead-body. He took it for a log of wood, and with the help of that corpse, he managed somehow to reach the other bank safely. He was stripped naked while crossing the river. He immediately ran to the house of Chintamani and knocked at the door. The saying, "Cupid is blind", is quite true. A passionate man knows neither fear no shame—*Kamaturanam Na Bhayam Na Lajja*.

Chintamani did not expect Vilwamangal that day, as it was the day of Sraddha of his father. She had bolted the door from inside and gone to sleep. Vilwamangal shouted several times. There was no answer. Then he scaled the walls with the help of what he took to be a rope. He somehow got inside and woke the girl up. Chintamani was simply stunned to see Vilwamangal in that wretched plight. Abominable stink was emanating from his body. She went outside and saw a huge cobra. Vilwamangal had mistaken that cobra for a rope. Chintamani, out of compassion, rebuked Vilwamangal thus: "Fie on thee, O miserable wretch! You call yourself the son of a pious Brahmin. What a shame! You have brought disgrace to your family. Instead of keeping this death anniversary day of your father very sacred, you have come to me in this miserable condition. Are you not a despicable fool? Why are you so much fascinated by my wretched body which is composed of flesh, bone and blood and is filled with urine and faecal matter? That loathsome dead-body with which you crossed the river, whose stink you cannot bear now was, till only yesterday, more attractive than my loathsome physical body which you love so much. If you had had the same kind of longing to have Darshan of the Lord, who is the fountain of beauty, who is the Beauty of beauties, you would have been blessed with His glorious Darshan ere long and you would have attained immortality and eternal bliss".

These words of Chintamani touched the heart of Vilwamangal. His eyes were opened now. He recollected the days of his boyhood, his study of religious books and his devotion to his father. He wept bitterly. Wisdom dawned now. There was real awakening of divine Prem now. He took Chintamani, in his heart of hearts, as his Guru. He said, "O mother, you have removed my illusion. I am grateful to you. You are my spiritual preceptor". He prostrated before her and departed. He wandered about in search of God.

After some time Vilwamangal met a young, handsome girl on the road. He became passionate. His mind was excited. His eyes turned towards her. He followed the girl to her house. The girl went inside and disappeared. Vilwamangal sat at the verandah in a dejected mood. The owner of the house came and asked Vilwamangal the object of his coming. Vilwamangal revealed his whole heart to him. He asked the house-owner to bring the lady before him for him to see her face just once to his heart's content. The good-natured merchant went inside to bring the lady, who was his wife, to show to Vilwamangal, if it could give him satisfaction.

Now the merciful Lord came to Vilwamangal's rescue. He filled Vilwamangal's mind with wisdom and remorse. Vilwamangal plucked two thorns from the neighbouring Bael tree. The merchant brought his wife. Vilwamangal saw her and chided himself thus, "O wicked eyes! It is you only who drove me into the wicked path. I will punish you now severely". This is like the *Sermon on the Mount* by Lord Jesus. "If your eyes do harm, pluck them out. If your hands do harm, chop them off." Vilwamangal pricked his eyes with the two thorns. The eyes bled profusely. Vilwamangal then began to dance in ecstasy and to recite God's Name at the top of his voice. His heart was purified now. There was descent of the Lord's grace. Vilwamangal's longing for the Darshan of Lord Krishna became keen and intense. His heart began burning with Viraha. He started pining day by day. Tears gushed out from his eyes like a fountain. Vilwamangal roamed about in jungles without food or drink.

Lord Krishna appeared before Vilwamangal in the guise of a cowherd boy. He talked to Vilwamangal: "My dear sir, you must be feeling hungry and thirsty now. I have brought some sweetmeat and water for you. Kindly accept this". Vilwamangal was thrown into extreme joy. He enquired of the boy, "My dear boy, what is your name? Where do you live? What do you do?". The boy replied, "Dear sir, I live in the vicinity. I have no name of my own. You can call me by any name. I graze cows. I love those who love me. I will come here daily and feed you". Those charming words of the boy gave immense delight to Vilwamangal. Vilwamangal did not know that the boy was Lord Krishna. Anyhow the boy took possession of his heart. The boy came once again and said to Vilwamangal, "Dear sir, would you accompany me to Brindavan?". When Vilwamangal heard the name "Brindavan", he was thrown into rapturous joy. He replied, "My dear boy, how can I proceed to Brindavan as I am blind?". The boy replied, "Dear sir, take hold of this stick at one end. I shall guide you by holding the other end". Vilwamangal agreed. Lord Krishna led him by the stick. How merciful is God! The boy said, "Look here, sir, we have reached Brindavan". Vilwamangal thought that the boy was joking with him. He did not believe him. He caught hold of the boy's hand. The magnetic touch opened his Divya Chakshu or inner eye and produced a divine thrill in his heart. He saw the brilliant, beautiful countenance of his beloved Lord. Vilwamangal said, "O Lord! I have been able to catch hold of You after long, long years of struggle. I will not let You go now". Lord Krishna, with a strong jerk, extricated Himself from the clutches of Vilwamangal.

Vilwamangal said, "O Krishna! You have managed to free Yourself from the clutches of my hand. But I challenge You now. I throw down by gauntlet before You. Try to extricate Yourself from the chambers of my heart. I have fixed You there". Lord Krishna said, "My dear Vilwamangal, I am surely defeated. The only cord that can bind Me is true love. You have bound Me with this cord of love. How can I escape now? I am your slave".

Lord Krishna passed his fingers over the eyes of Vilwamangal. Vilwamangal regained his lost eyesight. He saw the beautiful face of Lord Krishna. He prostrated at His lotus feet and bathed them with his tears.

Lord Krishna lifted him up and embraced him. The dancing girl Chintamani, the merchant and his wife also had the fortune to have the Darshan of Lord Krishna.

Vilwamangal, otherwise known as Sur Das, spent the remaining years of his life in preaching Bhakti and the glory of the Name of the Lord. His inspiring songs are sung now throughout India. He eventually reached Param Dhama, the blissful, eternal abode of peace.

YOGI VEMANA

Birth and early life

Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita, "Even the most sinful of all sinners can cross over all sins by the raft of wisdom. Even the most sinful man can become dutiful and attain eternal peace". This is quite true in the case of Vemana, Arunagiri and St. Augustine. These three led a life of dissipation when they were young, but later on became saints of very great reputation. This gives great encouragement and hope to great sinners and intimates that they too can become great saints.

Vemana was born in 1820 in a rich family in the district of Godavari. His elder brother was King Anu Vema Reddy. Vemana was a Reddy by caste.

Narsamma was the wife of King Anu Vema Reddy. She was the first Guru of Vemana. She was very chaste, virtuous, kind, charitable and truthful. She treated Vemana with intense affection. Vemana regarded her as his mother.

Vemana kept a dancing girl and spent the whole of his time in her house. It was Narsamma who saved Vemana from the clutches of the prostitute. Therefore she became his first Guru.

Vemana wasted his time. He was idle. He visited one morning the State jeweller's shop where Abhirama was preparing the State jewels. Vemana supervised the work of Abhirama. He continued this sort of work for some days. He was in the shop throughout the day and asked explanation for Abhirama's late attendance. Abhirama said, "My lord, I have to take bath in the early morning and perform prayer, worship and meditation. Therefore I humbly beg that you will kindly excuse my late attendance". Vemana replied, "I cannot tolerate this on any account. Finish your duties earlier and attend the shop at 6 a.m. I cannot excuse delay hereafter under any circumstance".

The king came to know of this strict rule of Vemana. He said, “Quite strange indeed! Vemana reproves Abhirama for his late attendance. He cannot excuse Abhirama’s late attendance. But he himself is spending days and nights in the house of a prostitute”.

The remarks of the king wounded Vemana’s vanity. He wanted to find out what exactly Abhirama was doing in the early morning hours. He wished to take Abhirama to task if he had uttered an untruth.

Initiation by Siva Yogi

Vemana went in the early morning to the neighbourhood of Abhirama’s house, concealed himself and closely watched all the movements and activities of Abhirama.

Abhirama woke up in the early morning and walked a distance of one mile. He answered his calls and took his bath in the tank. He offered oblations to Surya or the Sun-God and meditated for one hour on Padmasana. Thereupon he collected some flowers from a neighbouring garden and went to a cave to pay his respects to a saint called Lambika Siva Yogi.

Abhirama prostrated before the Yogi and kept the flowers at his feet. The Yogi said, “O beloved disciple! I am extremely pleased with your service and devotion. Come here tomorrow morning. I shall initiate you. I will throw off this mortal coil tomorrow”.

Vemana overheard this conversation between Abhirama and the Siva Yogi from behind.

Abhirama thanked his Guru and was highly delighted to know that he would receive his initiation the next day. He took leave of the Yogi, reached the shop and began to work. That day Vemana did not ask from Abhirama any explanation for his late attendance. Abhirama was quite surprised at this.

Vemana wanted to get the initiation himself the next day from Siva Yogi. He devised a plan to stop Abhirama from going to his Guru. He informed his sister-in-law that she should make Abhirama attend the shop precisely at 6 a.m. the next day.

Vemana’s sister-in-law said to the king, “I have lost one of my ear-rings. Kindly order Abhirama to make this ear-ring tomorrow early morning. I must get it anyhow before 8 a.m." The king acted accordingly.

Abhirama was in a great dilemma. If he did not meet Siva Yogi the next morning, the fruits of his several years of devoted service to his Guru would be lost. He had a severe conflict of thoughts in his mind; whether to obey his Guru or the king. After some serious thinking, he resolved to do the duty to which he was called by birth and profession. He went to his shop at 6 a.m. and sent the ear-ring to the queen.

Vemana woke up very early, took his bath in the tank in which Abhirama had taken his bath the previous day, collected some flowers in the neighbouring garden, placed them at the feet of Siva Yogi and prostrated himself at his feet.

Siva Yogi said, "What brought you here?". Vemana replied, "O adorable Guru! Abhirama, my master, has been detained on some urgent work under the orders of the king. He has instructed me to pay my respects to you and wait on you without any delay".

Siva Yogi said, "See if Abhirama is coming". Vemana pretended to look around and said that he was not coming. Siva Yogi waited for some time and again said, "See if Abhirama is coming". Vemana gave the same reply. Siva Yogi said for the third time, "See once more". Vemana went outside again, pretended to look around, and said that Abhirama was not coming.

Siva Yogi said, "Abhirama is a most unfortunate man indeed. I wanted to initiate him into the secrets of a Mantram. Today only he has failed to keep up his appointment. He never failed to come to me all these years. It is quite strange. How cruel is fate! However, I shall teach you something as I am leaving this mortal coil today".

Siva Yogi whispered the Mantram in the ears of Vemana and wrote some Bija Akshara on his tongue. He pressed the eyes of Vemana. Vemana had a vision of an effulgent light which resembled in its splendour the radiance of a hundred suns. He was struck with wonder.

Siva Yogi gave up his vital breath at once. Vemana came back to his house with a heavy heart on account of his guilty conscience. He went to the shop of Abhirama and prostrated before him, caught hold of his feet and asked for pardon. Abhirama was quite surprised at the strange conduct of Vemana, because Vemana had been stiff, arrogant and harsh towards him previously and demanded explanation for his late attendance. Vemana did not leave the feet of Abhirama till Abhirama said, "I excuse you".

Thereupon Vemana informed Abhirama all that had happened and expressed his keen gratitude for the unconditional pardon so gladly granted by him. He praised the noble attributes of Abhirama in beautiful Telugu verse and admitted the mischievous part he had played in depriving Abhirama of his precious initiation. In another verse he regarded his sister-in-law Narsamma as his first Guru, Abhiraman as the second and Siva Yogi as his Atma Guru.

Vemana became an inspired poet from the moment the Bija Akshara was written on his tongue by Siva Yogi. He attained spiritual illumination. He became an ascetic and abandoned the transient sensual pleasures of the world. He gave forth his teachings in extempore verse. He has shown his gratitude to Abhirama by introducing the latter's name in his verses. Vemana has thus perpetuated Abhirama's memory. He says in one verse, "O sir, be not sorry for what has happened. I am highly grateful to you. I dedicate all my verses to you and perpetuate your name on this earth. I worship you in my heart always. On account of you I have been able to speak out thousands of verses. I bow to thee, O adorable Master!".

Vemana's mother tried her level best to get her son married. But Vemana obstinately declined to marry.

His miracles

Vemana's mother started on a pilgrimage to Varanasi. Vemana passed a string through a hole made in the centre of a copper piece and tied it round his mother's neck and said, "Dear mother, if this piece of copper is turned into gold by the time you come back from your pilgrimage, you may rest assured that all your sins were purged by the sacred waters of the Ganges. This is the test. Worship God with true devotion".

Vemana's mother returned after a year. Vemana ran up to her and prostrated at her feet. She forgot all about the copper piece. Vemana said, "Mother, give me the gold coin. Has the copper piece been turned into gold?". Vemana's mother looked round her neck. The copper piece remained in the same state.

Vemana said, "You took great pains in going to Varanasi on a pilgrimage. You took a bath in the sacred Ganges. But you have not had intense faith in the pilgrimage or the bath to turn this small copper piece into gold. This clearly indicates that you have no sincere devotion. If you have intense and sincere devotion, every place will be a Varanasi for you. Of what avail is this troublesome pilgrimage if there is no sincere devotion?".

The mother asked, "Beloved Vemana! How can copper become gold?".

Vemana said, "Dear mother! I will show you how sincere faith will accomplish this". He took the copper piece from his mother and poured water on it. It was turned into real gold immediately. He placed it in the hands of his mother. She and all those who were present were struck with wonder.

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Vemana approached the king, his brother, and said to him, "Dear brother, kindly accept this piece of copper and grant me an acre of land in exchange. I want to cultivate it and raise crops".

The worldly people cannot understand the mysterious ways of saints and Yogis. The king laughed heartily and said, "Vemana, your proposal to become a cultivator is indeed very funny. Your offering a price for the land is funnier still". Narsamma, the queen, said to her husband, "Kindly do not think of Vemana so lightly. He is a great Yogi and Bhakta. His ways are mysterious. Accept his offering and give him the land". The king consented. An acre of land was granted to Vemana.

Vemana purchased a pair of lean, old, half-famished oxen, yoked them to a plough and began to till the ground. People began to laugh heartily at this strange act of a novice farmer. Vemana sowed seeds of bitter melon. In course of time there was an exuberant crop of bitter melons.

One day an old woman came to Vemana and said, "I and my grandchildren are starving to death. Please give me some work". Vemana said, "Collect these melons and heap them up. I shall give you wages in the night". The old woman consented. She collected a big heap of fruits. Vemana gave a fruit to the old woman as her wages for the day. The old woman was greatly afflicted at heart. She reflected within herself, "How can I feed the children today? They are starving. What can I do with this single fruit?". She returned home with a sorrowful heart. The two little grandchildren ran up to her and said, "Grandmother! What wages did you earn today?". She related the whole story and placed the fruit in the hands of one grandson. He was very much enraged. He said, "My grandmother works very hard although she is very old. Is this the reward of her hard labour?". He dashed the fruit against the floor. He fell senseless immediately, because some glittering gold grains, which fell from the fruit on the floor dazzled his eyes. After a short time, he came back to consciousness.

The old woman collected all the scattered grains and gave to a shopkeeper. He gave her rice, Ghee, Dal and other things. She took them to her house. The children were very much delighted when they saw a large quantity of provisions.

The old woman and her two grandsons and some other Coolies worked in Vemana's field the next day. Vemana gave a fruit to each of them in the evening as their day's wages. Some of them stole away some fruits. The Coolies cut open the fruits. Only those which Vemana gave contained golden grains. Those that were stolen contained bitter seeds only.

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Vemana then went to his brother, the king, and requested him to pay a visit to his field and see the crop of fruits. The king laughed heartily at the proposal made by Vemana. He said to Vemana, "Mind your business. Enjoy the crop yourself". Thereupon Vemana approached his sister-in-law, the queen, and said that his brother had declined to accept his invitation to pay a visit to his field and he was very much disappointed.

Narsamma went to her husband and said, "It is not proper to disappoint your brother, Vemana, when he has made a sincere request to you to visit his field. He is very much dejected. Kindly pay a visit and satisfy him. He is a Yogi. Bhakta and poet".

The king agreed to pay a visit to the field of Vemana to see the crops in his field. The ministers and his queen also accompanied him. Vemana showed the two big heaps of fruits to the king and touched the heaps with his own hand. Lo! All the fruits were changed into golden fruits. All were struck with amazement.

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On one occasion, Vemana went inside the palace where the queen was sitting and made a scratch in her breast with his nails. Blood began to ooze out at once. The queen did not find fault with this strange behaviour of Vemana. She thought that it must have some purpose. She knew that Vemana was a great Yogi.

But the news reached the ears of the king through the maid-servants. The king demanded of the queen an explanation for her conduct. She gave him a suitable reply and removed all suspicion on his part. In the evening, she went to the palace garden. She was bitten by a cobra and fell unconscious. The maid-servants ran to the palace and informed the king. The king came to the spot where the queen was lying senseless. The palace-doctor came and tried to apply an antidote. But the poison came out through the scratch in the breast. The queen came back to her consciousness. She thanked Vemana for saving her life. To the king and the queen, the puzzle of the morning was now solved. They said that Vemana had keen foresight and knowledge of the future.

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Vemana's mother said, "Dear son! Be religious. Take bath in the early morning and do some worship just as your brother, the king, does!". Vemana replied, "O adorable mother, my brother takes bath to wash the impurities of the body. He does Japa and worship to get more wealth. He has no real faith and devotion. Now follow me to the tank. I shall show you the nature of my bath".

Then Vemana took his mother to the tank. He entered the tank, cut his stomach and washed all the impurities inside. When he came out of the tank, the stomach became as usual.

His mother was struck with wonder. Thereupon, Vemana disappeared in the twinkling of an eye. Vemana's mother was very much afflicted at heart on account of the separation of her son. She slowly returned to her house, and to her great joy, found Vemana in her house.

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Vemana's younger sister came to pay her respects to her brother and obtain his blessings before her departure to her husband's house after marriage. She prostrated before Vemana. Vemana gave her some rotten fruits. The fruits were transformed into gems and diamonds.

His last days

Vemana became a wandering ascetic. He travelled throughout Andhra Pradesh and disseminated his Telugu verses. The collection of his verses comes to four thousand. The current of Advaita Vedantic thought runs through his verses. Most of his verses convey more than one meaning. For simplicity of diction, clearness of sense, chastity of style, keenness of vision, subtle profundity of thought and deep penetration, Vemana's verses are unsurpassed in Telugu literature. Vemana's reputation in the Telugu country will last as long as Telugu is spoken by the people.

Vemana settled at Katarupalli after finishing his tour and gave instructions to his disciples and followers. Here he entered into Mahasamadhi. His disciples erected a tomb over the place where his bones were buried. His anniversary is celebrated with great pomp in the village even at the present day. Some miracles occur near the Samadhi even to this day.

Once a thunderbolt fell in Vemana's tomb, but there was no crack in the tomb. Vemana came out of the tomb and appeared to the people with the thunderbolt in his hand and as a boy of twelve years. One of his disciples sang in his praise a Sata-stotra, a hundred couplets in Sanskrit. Then Vemana entered back into the tomb.

Glory to Vemana, a marvellous Yogi, a great Bhakta and an inspired poet-philosopher of Andhra. May his blessings be upon us all!

JAYA DEVA

"The sky is clouded and the wood resembles
The sky, thick-arched with black Tamala boughs;
O Radha! Radha! take this soul that trembles
In life's deep midnight, to Thy golden house!
So Narada spoke—and led by Radha's Spirit,
The feet of Krishna found the road aright;
Wherefore, in bliss which all high hearts inherit,
Together taste they, Love's Divine delight!"

These are the opening lines of a translation by Edwin Arnold of a piece of poetic composition in Sanskrit called *Gita Govinda*, the theme of which is the Divine Love between Radha and Krishna. The author is Jaya Deva, a great reputed Bhakta who lived about five hundred years ago, in a village called Bilvagam, near the sacred city of Jagannath-Puri in the state of Orissa. *Gita Govinda* is the most celebrated poetical work of Sri Jaya Deva.

His birth

Jaya Deva's father was Narayana Sastriar, a very pious Brahmin. Jaya Deva's mother's name was Kamalabai. She was pious and devoted. Sastriar and his wife had no child for a long number of years. Sastriar had no desire for children. But Kamalabai nurtured a secret desire for a son. She did not reveal this to her husband. She constantly prayed to the Lord that she might be blessed with a beautiful and virtuous male child. She was ashamed to be regarded by the world as a barren woman.

One night Narayana Sastri dreamt that the Lord appeared and told him that his wife's prayer would be fulfilled and that he would soon have an illustrious son. Sastriar woke up and reported to his wife his happy dream. He asked her if she made any prayer to God for the boon of a child. She admitted that she did pray. Narayana Sastri felt extremely grieved that all their Tapas and devotion became useless on account of their selfish motive. He became angry with his wife and said, "Foolish woman, you ought not to have prayed for a son. You ought to have prayed for the eternal bliss of Atma. You have ruined yourself and me also". He did not speak to his wife from that moment. She appealed to her husband for pardon, but to no purpose. They both even fasted for a day or two.

A holy pious Brahmin entered their house and enquired into the cause of their grief and reconciled them both. He said that it was the will of the Lord that they should be blessed with a virtuous son and that the child would become a great and reputed saint.

Narayana Sastriar thought that the Lord Himself had appeared in human form. A few months thereafter, a male child was born to Kamalabai. That was Jaya Deva.

Jaya Deva was highly devoted to God even in his boyhood. His Upanayana ceremony was performed when he was five years old. He studied all the sacred scriptures. He had an orthodox type of education.

Narayana Sastri entered the forest along with his wife to lead the life of a Vanaprasthi.

His marriage

There was one Brahmin in Jagannath-Puri by name Deva Sharma. He was a great Bhakta of Lord Jagannath; but, for many years, he had no child. One day he prayed to the Lord, "O Lord! If I beget children through Thy grace, I shall surely dedicate the first among them to Thee. This is my sincere heartfelt prayer. O dear Lord! Kindly grant this, my wish". So praying, he returned to his house.

Then, in due course of time, a daughter was born to the devout Brahmin Deva Sharma, and afterwards, many good and brilliant sons. Taking the daughter with him, one day he came to Lord Jagannath with his wife by his side and said, "O Lord! By Thy grace, my desire has been fulfilled. According to my promise, I dedicate this first child to Thee. Kindly accept her". Then he narrated all the previous story to the Pujakas or worshippers and went back to his house.

That night the Lord appeared in Deva Sharma's dream and told him, "O Deva Sharma! I am highly pleased with you.

I have accepted your child. But, give your daughter to Sri Jaya Deva, because he is my dear devotee". The same dream the worshippers also had.

Jaya Deva was then living outside the village boundary in a leafy Kutia. He was meditating upon Lord Jagannath and his face showed clearly that he was extremely happy in spite of his material poverty. Sharma came there, and prostrating to Jaya Deva said, "By the command of Lord Jagannath I have brought my daughter Padmavati to you. Kindly accept her". Jaya Deva declined the offer, saying that he was very poor and that he was not a fit person to accept Kanya Dana. Despite all efforts, Jaya Deva did not accept the girl. Deva Sharma brought the worshippers of the temple to verify his statement.

Then, making the girl stand nearby, Deva Sharma said, "O my dear daughter! From today he is your husband. You have to worship him daily. A woman merged in the service of her husband attains undying happiness". Thus saying, he returned to his house.

The girl stood for a long time near Jaya Deva. Jaya Deva said to the girl, "Your parents have gone away leaving you here. How are you going to live in this dreadful forest?". Padmavati replied, "O my lord! What are you saying? My father has given me to you. I belong to you now. I am not alone here, because you are always with me". Hearing these words of Padmavati, Jaya Deva thought, "She is speaking the truth. Surely it will be a sin to abandon her. Hence I shall have to go to her parents' house and marry her according to the ritualistic ceremonies". Thus resolving, Jaya Deva asked Padmavati to follow him to her parents' house for marriage according to Brahminical rites.

Padmavati said, "My father has ordered me to obey your commands implicitly. Therefore, this is a great blessing to me to act as per your wish". So saying she was ready by his side.

Thereupon Jaya Deva married Padmavati, daughter of Deva Sharma. He was liberal. He fed the poor and gave presents to Brahmins. He would never eat without at least one guest. The little money that Narayana Sastri had left was in a short time exhausted. Afterwards Jaya Deva begged rice in the orthodox Brahmin style. Despite the poverty, Jaya Deva and Padmavati lived very happily. Even though they were very poor, they never ate without some guests. Their heart was filled with pure love and devotion. They were respected by all.

Gita Govinda

Jaya Deva wrote his grand immortal poem *Gita Govinda* which celebrates the glorious divine love of Radha and Krishna. All the people of the little village Bilvagam recited the Ashtakas. The Ashtakas were sung before Lord Jagannath during the annual festival. People were struck by the splendid music and poetry of *Gita Govinda* and praised it highly. The fame of Jaya Deva reached far and wide.

When Jaya Deva was composing the *Gita Govinda* and was in the middle of his composition, he could not find a suitable word. He kept the manuscripts in the room and went for a bath.

Lord Krishna Himself took up the form of Jaya Deva and asked Padmavati, "My dear, give me those manuscripts". Padmavati gave the Lord the manuscripts. She took the Lord for her husband. Lord Krishna wrote the couplet in His own handwriting. Again He went hurriedly for His bath in the river.

After a short while, Jaya Deva came to his house after his bath. He took up the manuscripts to jot down the poem which he had composed. To his great amazement, he found the couplet written there by somebody. He said to his wife, "O Padmavati! Who has written this poem? It is exceedingly beautiful. I could not write like this".

Padmavati said, "You yourself came suddenly, wrote the poem and at once returned for bath". Jaya Deva was struck with awe and wonder. Lord Jagannath appeared in his dream and said, "O Jaya Deva, I Myself wrote the couplet". Jaya Deva woke up and rejoiced heartily.

When the king of the country heard the glory and fame of *Gita Govinda*, he became jealous of Jaya Deva. As he himself was a poet, he wrote another Gita Govinda.

Once the king came to the temple of Jagannath. Jaya

Deva was then dancing and singing his own *Gita Govinda*. The king said, "Why do you not sing *my* Gita Govinda?". Jaya Deva said, "The Lord is not so much pleased with your own work as He is with my *Gita Govinda*. Let us test this now".

The king ordered both his work and Jaya Deva's work to be placed before the Lord. The king prayed to the Lord, "Please keep that which is better and dearer to You on the top". All came outside and bolted the door. After a short time all went inside. The king opened the door first. He saw Jaya Deva's book kept over his own book.

The king was very much afflicted at heart. He gave up food and water. He had a dream. The Lord of Jagannath appeared in the dream and said, "Why do you grieve unnecessarily? There is no Kavya dearer to me than the *Gita Govinda*. I am pleased with your composition also. But, accept Jaya Deva's *Gita Govinda* as superior to your book. Propagate Jaya Deva's *Gita Govinda* all over the land". The king woke up and regained strength. He became a great devotee of Jaya Deva. He himself studied by heart Jaya Deva's *Gita Govinda*. He propagated the work of Jaya Deva throughout the land.

One woman was singing beautifully the *Gita Govinda* in the forests, when she was collecting fruits for sale. Lord Jagannath was very much pleased with her singing. He began to wander in the forest to hear her recitation. The Lord's garment was torn to pieces while He was running all over the forest, as it was caught in the thorny bushes of the forest.

In the early morning, the priest of the temple and the king saw the Pitambara of the Lord in rags. They were not able to find out the reason for the torn condition of the Pitambara. They prayed to the Lord to make them know the reason.

The Lord appeared in their dream and said, "One woman was singing Gita Govinda in the forest. I ran in the forest to hear her song. When I ran, the Pitambara was torn to pieces by the thorns".

The king and the priest praised both Jaya Deva and the woman who was selling fruits. The king brought the woman to his state and gave her immense wealth. She sang daily the *Gita Govinda* in the presence of the king.

The Lord becomes a slave of His devotees. He will do anything for the sake of His devotees.

Robbers cut Jaya Deva's hands and feet

Jaya Deva's father-in-law came to see his son-in-law and stayed with him for some days. He took Padmavati for a short stay with her mother.

A rich merchant named Bhagavan Das, native of a neighbouring village, came to Bilvagam and requested Jaya Deva to go to his house as a guest. Jaya Deva consented and accompanied the merchant. He stayed in the house of the merchant for some days. The merchant sent back Jaya Deva to Bilvagam in his own carriage loaded with many rich presents. There was a small forest between the two villages. A band of robbers came and attacked Jaya Deva. Jaya Deva gave them all the things. But the robbers suspected from the readiness with which Jaya Deva gave away all the things that he might report them to the police and get them punished. Therefore they cut off his hands and feet and threw him into a waterless well.

Jaya Deva bore all the sufferings patiently. He prayed to the Lord that the robbers might be pardoned. He gave himself up to the care of God. He was fully conscious that God did everything for his good. He never made any complaint to God. He thought that a very great bad Karma had been purged out. He had perfect belief that what had happened was not an act of the robbers but the bidding of God Himself for his own good. This is the Bhav or the mental attitude of all real devotees. They always welcome suffering, trials and adversities.

The king of that province who had been out for hunting came to the very well where Jaya Deva was lying helpless, to see if there was water in it to quench his thirst. He did not find any water in the well, but he saw a mangled human body. At once he ordered his servants to lift up Jaya Deva. The servants carried out the orders of the king immediately. The king arranged to take Jaya Deva with him. In the course of his return to his capital, he asked Jaya Deva what his name was. As soon as the king came to know that the man was Jaya

Deva of great reputation, he fell at his feet and requested him to accept him as his disciple. The king adored Jaya Deva as his Guru. Jaya Deva was carried in a palanquin. There was a grand procession in the town with music etc. Jaya Deva was installed as the chief Guru of the state.

The saintly nature of Jaya Deva, his piety, wide knowledge, spiritual attainments and his resignation to the will of God made a very deep impression on the mind of the king. One day the king approached the Guru and wanted to be initiated into the Sannyasin life.

Jaya Deva said, "O king! Sannyasa is not external renunciation. Real renunciation is of the mind. Renunciation of desires and egoism constitutes real renunciation. One may give up his wife, children and wealth and yet he may not be a Sannyasin, because he may be attached to them all in his mind. There is not much benefit in external renunciation. Be a Grihastha Sannyasin as I am trying to be. Be a king outwardly, but internally be a mental Sannyasin".

The king was quite astonished to know that Jaya Deva had a wife. He was under the impression that his Guru had renounced the world. The king thought there was great truth in the advice of Jaya Deva. He sent some woman-servants with a palanquin to Bilvagam to fetch Padmavati.

Padmavati who had been to her mother's house returned to Bilvagam. She did not find her husband in the house. She thought that Jaya Deva had abandoned her and gone away as a Sannyasin. Her father searched for Jaya Deva in all the neighbouring villages, but could not find him. He thought that Jaya Deva had gone to the forest for doing Sadhana and Tapas. Padmavati was sunk in grief, because on her return from her mother's house, she found her own house empty, her husband missing, and the enquiries she made about him here and there were all in vain. When she heard the news of her husband through the woman-servants, her joy became unbounded. Padmavati reached the palace and met her husband. She fell at the holy feet of her husband and washed them with tears of love and devotion. Jaya Deva told his wife how he lost his hands and feet. Padmavati was very much afflicted at heart when she looked at the mangled form of her husband.

She prayed to the Lord, "Will not the Lord Jagannath, the all-merciful, restore to my husband his hands and feet?". The Lord granted her prayer. Jaya Deva regained his hands and feet by the touch of Padmavati. They lived together happily under the patronage of the king.

Another version of the story

The king regarded Padmavati as Goddess Lakshmi. He revered her more than he revered his mother. He ordered it to be proclaimed in his country and its neighbourhood that devotees of all creeds would be sumptuously entertained and given rich presents. All the Sadhus who came had first to visit Jaya Deva. Afterwards Jaya Deva sent them to the king. All the Sadhus who went to the king were entertained nicely and given rich presents.

The robbers who offended Jaya Deva heard of the king's hospitality and charity. They put on the robes of Sannyasins and appeared before Jaya Deva. They saw Jaya Deva and recognized him. Jaya Deva also knew who they were. Fearing punishment, they stealthily left the palace. Jaya Deva sent men to pursue them and bring them back. The servants brought them back. Jaya Deva bowed to them. When the king came, Jaya Deva directed him to prostrate at their feet, garland them and treat them with great respect. Then they were removed to a palatial residence and entertained as if they were members of the royal family. The robbers were not happy. They were every moment expecting a sentence for execution. Therefore one day they informed that they wanted to return to their native place. Jaya Deva told the king in great joy and in an unblemished manner, "Aey! On the way there is a great forest. To help these poor scholars, please send some of your soldiers. There are great robbers in the forest".

The king presented the robbers nice good garments and immense wealth and sent five soldiers to accompany them. On the way, all of them sat near a tree for taking rest. The soldiers said to the robbers, after a long talk on some point, "Please tell us who you are. In what way are you connected with the poet? See how he helped you; he asked the king himself to give you enough comforts".

The robbers smiled and told the soldiers, "Yes, now hear the reason for all this. We were sitting somewhere near the residence of the King of Karnátaka for the sake of Bhiksha. There came this Brahmin also searching for wealth. There this greedy contemptible Brahmin stole some money from one man's house. That man brought this poet to the court of the king. The rich man told the king, 'O king, this is not a real Brahmin at all. This is a great thief. He lives by theft only. Now he had stolen wealth from my house. I got him tied by my servants and now I have brought him to Your Highness'. The king called for a Pariah and told him to take this Brahmin out of the country and kill him. The Pariah dragged this Brahmin out and took him out of the vicinity of the country. There we saw this Brahmin crying in a helpless condition. We told the Pariah not to kill this Brahmin. We asked him to drive the Brahmin out of the country and cut off his fingers only instead of putting him to death. We instructed the Chandala to show the king only the fingers. Thus advised, the Pariah took him far out of the country, and somewhere there, cut off the Brahmin's feet and hands and showed these cut portions to the king. This is the story, O soldiers! Therefore this Brahmin is worshipping us, because we saved him from the king's command".

When the robbers were speaking thus, there was a terrible sound up above in the sky. There was a tremendous thunder and it fell horribly on the heads of those robbers. They perished at once. The royal servants all lost their consciousness and stood like stones for some time. They regained consciousness after a while, wondered at the dreadful scene and came back to the palace. But the king had not come from Jaya Deva's house. Therefore the soldiers went to Jaya Deva's house with the wealth given to the robbers. They said to the king with folded hands, "O king! Those scholars were struck by a terrible thunder and they all died instantaneously. We have come bringing back all the clothes and wealth given to them". The king could not understand all these marvellous changes. He did not know what actually had happened. "What happened? What happened?" the king queried. Then the soldiers told the story relating to those dead persons and the news regarding the cutting off of Jaya Deva's hands and feet as related by them.

Hearing this, Jaya Deva, the kind-hearted poet cried, "Ha, ha!". He sobbed very much, striking his crippled limbs on the ground in great distress. At once the hands and legs of Jaya Deva became all right. Jaya Deva had his normal limbs as before. (This is another version.) All were wonder-struck to witness this surprising event! Hearing the death of those barbarous people, Jaya Deva felt very much at heart. The Lord, Purushottama, felt very much for the miserable state of Sri Jaya Deva and gave him his original hands and feet.

The king questioned Jaya Deva what the real matter was. He again and again prostrated to Jaya Deva and beseeched him to tell him the secret underlying all those incidents. Then Jaya Deva related to the king all that had happened from the beginning to the end of his connection with the robbers. The king was very much pleased on knowing this great marvellous story. The king praised Jaya Deva and said, "O Jaya Deva! You are the only really fortunate man in this world. Nobody is equal to you in this world. At least I have seen and heard in this world of a wonderful man who treats his friends and enemies alike. Even if I am a very contemptuous creature before you, I am really very very fortunate to have this personal connection with you".

The king praised Jaya Deva again and again still more. Then he came back to his own palace and told all the wonderful story to his sons, wife and ministers in the court.

Chastity of Padmavati

Once the king's brother died due to old age. His wife, a great Pativrata, was determined to follow her husband on his pyre. The king and the queen arrived there to witness the scene.

At that time, Padmavati, wife of Jaya Deva, also came to see the woman who was about to enter the fire. The queen said, "Padmavati! Have you come to see the Sati?". Padmavati replied, "Shame! Shame!! What Pativrata is this who has not burnt to ashes at the very news of her husband's death? Fie, what is this—trying to burn oneself *after* the husband's death in a fire of fuel? If a woman does not leave her Pranas at the very moment of her husband's departure from this world, then where is her devotion, where is her love, where is her austerity towards her beloved husband?".

The queen said, "What do you say? Are you so very sure of this in your own case? How can this be possible? Let me see, I shall test you one day. I will wait for an opportunity".

One day the king wished to have the Darshan of Sri Purushottama and proceeded to the temple together with his friend Jaya Deva with devotion and love. The king spent the night with Jaya Deva in the temple itself.

In the early morning, the queen sent for Padmavati. Padmavati went in a hurry and asked the queen what help her humble self could do to the queen. The queen began to sob bitterly and beat her head and breast in great agony. She said to Padmavati, "The king went to the temple with your husband for the Darshan of Lord Purushottama. But O! How can I speak.....your.....dear husband breathed his last. Struck with terrible grief at the death of his great friend, the king has not returned from the temple as yet. The servants have returned and told me the sorrowful news".

Hearing these words of the queen, Padmavati was struck with a terrible shock. At once she fell down on the floor unconscious and left her Pranas.

The king and Jaya Deva returned from the temple. They both entered the palace and saw Padmavati lying dead on the floor. The king said to his wife, "What has happened to Padmavati?". The queen replied, "I wanted to test the chastity of Padmavati. She made a remark when your brother's wife was about to enter the funeral pyre. Today I said in jest that her husband died. She fell down unconscious and gave up her life-breath. Pardon me".

The king was very much annoyed towards the queen and said, "I will abandon you now. You can go anywhere you please". Jaya Deva pacified the king and said, "The queen is innocent. People would tell some untruth at one time or the other due to emotion and excitement". Jaya Deva took up the hands of Padmavati, thought of Lord Krishna and sang His glory. After a few moments Padmavati got up and joined her husband in singing the Lord's Song. The queen prostrated to Padmavati and begged her pardon.

Jaya Deva's last days

Jaya Deva took a vow that he would take bath in the Ganges till the end of his life. He became old. One day he fell down in an unconscious state while returning from his bath in the Ganges. After some time he regained consciousness. The king offered a palanquin to Jaya Deva. Jaya Deva totally declined to accept it. Ganges Herself appeared in the well in the house of Jaya Deva, with lotuses, on account of the force of Tapascharya of Jaya Deva and his devotion.

Such was the glorious life of Jaya Deva, the greatest devotee of Lord Krishna, who was humble, simple, unostentatious, who had no idea of possessions, who always found joy and happiness in meditation on Lord Krishna, and who was perfect, who was an embodiment of forgiveness. He was a Sannyasin though he remained with his wife. He understood the secret of renunciation. He knew that renunciation was mental with all senses completely restrained. His life is an example to show to the world that God-realisation can be had even in the householder's life.

Glory to Jaya Deva whose life inspires all!

VIDYARANYA

The Hindu Empire of Vijayanagar and the cultural kingdom of the Hindu Vedic lore are the temporal and the spiritual creations of Sri Vidyaranya, the twenty-first in the hierarchy of Sankaracharyas, beginning with Sri Adi Sankara Bhagavadpada.

At the site of Kishkindha, in a cool cave of the Rishyamukha mountain, the great Madhava was rapt in penance to invoke the Goddess Bala to bless him to achieve his heart's desire—the regeneration of Hindu culture and the establishment of Hindu sovereignty out of the then existent chaos, lawlessness and misery. He was so steadfast in his Tapas that the Goddess appeared before him in a trance. But what She told him was that his heart's desire would be fulfilled only in another birth. On hearing this, the great Yogi took Sannyasa, thereby literally taking another birth, and invoked the Goddess once again. Tradition has it that for about three hours it rained gold, gems and pearls, and that the great Madhava, now turned Vidyaranya, the Sannyasin, got instructions as to when and how he should found the Hindu Empire.

The site of Anegundi on the northern side of the Tungabhadra was already in existence. It was therefore on the southern side of the river, around the temple of Viroopaksha, that the great saint planned and built up his Vidyanagar. The two shepherd brothers who attended on him during his Tapascharya, giving him milk and rendering other necessary services, he made kings by name Hukka and Bukka. He made his own brother a minister, while he himself took care of the general direction of the Empire. So towering was his spiritual personality that he was lovingly known as Nirmamendra. The great Mandapa where Nirmamendra used to sit and perform his spiritual practices may still be seen in the bed of the Tungabhadra at Hampi, eight miles away from Hospet, now a station on the Guntakal-Bangalore railway line. Likewise, one may see on the southern Parikrama of the great Viroopaksha temple the shrine of Nirmamendra's Ishta Devata, the Goddess Bala. Hampi is in ruins today, as indeed is our great Aryan culture. Vast are the ruins; and the picture that is conjured up of the never-to-be-forgotten Vidyanagar, the creation of Vidyaranya, is almost Himalayan in grandeur.

Witnesses, both Indian and foreign, tell us that the city was a stupendous rectangle, eighteen miles long and ten miles broad. The Tungabhadra was so diverted into various channels that any corner of the city had access to fresh water. The city-planning was perfect, the sanitation excellent, trade prosperous and tranquillity exemplary. The citizens were honest and just, polite and hospitable to strangers. The great Chaikrya visited Vijayanagar in her hey-day. The catholic missionary, St. Francis Xavier, was astounded at the greatness of the Hindu kingdom, and despairing of success in his ambitious project of converting the people at large, confined his activities to the fishermen of the West and the Coromandal coasts. The great religious heads of the Ramanuja and the Madhava orders made the city their main place of stay, for Vidyanagar was easily the fountain-head of civilization.

Having established this grand city, Nirmamendra retired to Sringeri, the spiritual seat of the Sankaracharya in the south. There he set himself to complete his destined task of elucidating the Vedas. The great Veda Vyasa had codified the Vedas in part much as we see them now. Centuries had passed and Hindu valour had practically disappeared. The heathen had not only come on the scene, but begun to dominate it. The followers of many ancient Vedic Shakhas had had to run away before the onslaught of the Huns and the Turks. The Mohammedan invaders in their fanaticism and fury were doing away with the best monuments of Hindu art and culture. It was in this set-up that the Empire of Vijayanagar had risen and secured the people's safety. But the cultural rehabilitation of the country had yet to be brought about and this the great Vidyaranya sat down in his sixtieth year to achieve. It is said that he lived for ninety years thereafter.

Sri Madhava, as the great Vidyaranya was known before assuming Sannyas, was born in 1350 A.D. at Kundiram, Bellary, his father being Mayana and his mother Sumati. Madhava had two brothers. Sayana was the younger brother and Bodhanatha was the elder. Madhava belonged to the Yajurveda, Bodhayana Sutra, Bharadhvaja Gothra. He entered the Brahmacharya Ashrama in his eighth year and continued in that Ashrama for thirty-six years under his Guru Sarvajna Vishnu. In that period, he mastered the four Vedas with all their abstruse and esoteric significance.

The king Bukka or Bukkanna Raja, the faithful disciple of Sri Vidyaranya, requested Vidyaranya to issue a commentary on the four Vedas and placed the whole of the imperial resources at the disposal of his Guru and minister. The magnitude of Vidyaranya's plan for a new commentary made it impossible for one man to cope with. Vidyaranya therefore sought and requisitioned the collaboration of a large number of learned Pundits from all parts of India to work under his direction. Pundits thronged to Vijayanagar in thousands and raised the cultural status of the city. From the grand stone Mandapas of Viroopaksha, Vitthalaswami and Hazar Ramaswami temples in Humpi, we can form some conception of the vast halls where they used to assemble. Imposingly artistic were a number of them, like the Lotus Pavilion, which one may see even today, a lovely structure of lime, mortar and terra-cotta, with not a bit of wood in it. Add to these the many caves, big enough to accommodate thousands, where coolness reigned and great concentration and solitude could be maintained, and one can get an idea of the size of the learned congregations that laboured for restoration of the lost culture. The Emperor looked to all the material comforts of the men of learning and thus furthered the Vedic revival. Whereas the previous Bhashyakaras did not arrive at exact conclusions regarding the import of certain Mantras, Vidyaranya made himself precise.

The first Grantha composed by Madhava Vidyaranya was *Jaiminiya Nyayamala* in Mimamsa. Next he composed *Naiyayika Nyayamala.* Then he wrote his commentaries on the Taittiriya Samhita of the Yajurveda and on the Brahmanas and Aranyakas of the Yajurveda. He then turned to the commentary on Bodhayana Grihya Sutras, obviously to improve on his previous commentator, Bhavaswami.

Sri Vidyaranya wrote commentaries on the Adhvarya Kanda of the Yajurveda, on the hymns of the Rigveda, on the melodious Sama Veda and on the Atharva Veda dealing with the details of Yajna. Then he turned to the Dharma Sutras—to Parasara Smriti—and to Gita Bhashya. He is reputed to have composed a lexicon like Amara Kosha. He has composed masterly treatises on astronomy and medicine. Of these, however, the Gita Bhashya and the Amara Kosha remain yet to be traced.

Vidyaranya's commentary on the Rigveda is a marvel, they say, of accurate and wide knowledge. His preface to this commentary is so wonderful that it sharpens the intellect and awakens the hidden powers of understanding of the reader.

Prof. Max Muller was the first to translate this commentary for the West. Since then it has been rendered into French nd German. We can have an idea of this commentary if we ar in mind that it consists of a lakh and a half verses and ls with every conceivable subject under the sun. In com- ing this, Sri Vidyaranya depended mainly on Yaska's ukta and on the interpretations of the earlier commen- rs—Skanda, Narayana, Udgeeta and Venkita Madhava.

Rigveda and Sri Vidyaranya's commentary thereon have been the subject of careful and manifold research; and like the mighty sea, it yields treasures and continues as mysterious as ever. To edit Sri Vidyaranya's commentary on the Rigveda alone it took our modern scholars twenty-five years.

Vedic scholars of repute testify to Sri Vidyaranya's mastery of grammar, geography, astronomy, medicine, geometry and architecture. The matchless beauty and workmanship of the monumental temples at Sringeri and their secret import amply speak for Sri Vidyaranya's mastery of the Shilpa and the Mantra Shastras; for, it was he that created the glory that Sringeri is even now. During the destruction of Vijayanagar, the Mohammedans burnt Vidyaranya's grand library. When again the Sankaracharyas were obliged to move from Sringeri owing to the confusion resulting from the dismemberment of Vijayanagar after the battle of Talikota, many valuable manuscripts were lost, including originals.

Sri Vidyaranya is the one great soul that has laid bare the mystery and obscurity of the Vedas and enabled later generations to taste our ancient Aryan culture and lead lofty, honourable lives. From Ujjain in the north to Kanyakumari in the south, from Dwaraka in the west to Puri in the east were established enlightened colonies of learned Brahmins, especially on the banks of the great rivers, Ganga, Narmada, Godavari, Krishna, Cauvery and Tambraparani.

These details are mentioned only to trace their glory to the Nirmamendra whose cultural progeny we are. It may not be given to many of us to read and follow Vidyaranya's Rigveda Bhashya, his grand treatise on grammar, his Mantra Shastra exposition on his Ishta Devata Bala, by name *Vidyarnavam*, his *Brahma Gita* embodying the abstruse ideas of the Upanishads and his *Saubhashya Ratnakaram* on the devotional practices of Shakti worship. But it is our duty as his cultural children to drink deep the more easily accessible fountains of his wisdom such as his *Panchadasi*, his *Sankara Vijayam* (the life-story of Adi Sankara Bhagavadpada), his exposition of Parasara Smriti, and lastly, his preface to the Rigveda Bhashya—so singular an achievement in literature.

Glory to Vidyaranya ever and ever!

APPAYYA DIKSHITAR

There had ris'n the Moghul Empire
From the glowing ashes and fire
Of the Battle of Panipat,
When in a southern Brahmin's hut

Was born a lad that blew again
The Vedantic bugle amain,
And stirred from slumber and from sloth
With the urge of righteous wrath

The guardians of the Vedas,
Heirs of the Upanishads,
And made them stand alert intent
To hear the tune of sad lament

Break forth from India's anguished soul.
No longer may they sprawl and loll
On downy beds of idleness,
Complacent with their past greatness

When loud the manly bugle blared,
And the need for action declared.
The great Appayya Dikshitar
Was a saint, a sage and scholar.

He it was the clarion sounded,
Our hearts then with eclat bounded;
He it was that called in that age
To us to guard our heritage.

Versed was he in philosophy,
And e'er did he win the trophy
In duals and combats of learning,
Leaving savants with shame burning.

In rhetoric peerless was he,
And his fame Pundits did envy
And on him much mud they slung;
The aspirants to him they clung.

Sweet in praise of Siva he sang
Hymns that with rich melody rang,
And devotees still love to sing
Hymns by him, among poets a king.

For aspirants and learned men,
With learned skill and acumen,
.The four schools of thought he surveyed,
And their tenets to all conveyed

In learned treatises and books,
Unblemished by jaundiced looks,
And in commentaries bejewelled,
With Vedic wisdom unexcelled.

Like a golden ring on the spire
Of the Vedantic shell of fire,
Appayya Dikshitar did glisten
Among the wheel of lesser men.

Once to Tirupathi the sage
Went on a lonely pilgrimage,
And there the Mahant to him told:
"Enter not the fane; it can't hold

Within its precinct a Saivite;
To enter here you have no right."
Wrath was the saint, and quietly he
By occult power did o'ernight change

The fane's image of Lord Vishnu
To Siva. The Mahant turned blue
When in the morn he, aghast, saw
Vishnu's image changed to Siva.

To the great sage he now did run
And of him humbly beg pardon,
And asked the image be restored
To the shape he loved and adored.

Such was the great saint Appayya,
An incarnation of Siva,
Whom men still love and have reverence
For his wisdom and intelligence.

Appayya Dikshitar was born in Adayapalam, near Arni in the North Arcot district, in 1554 A.D., in the Krishna Paksha of the Kanya month of Pramateecha Varsha under the Uttara Proushthapada constellation. His father's name was Rangarajudhwari. Appaya had the name Vinayaka Subramanya when his Namakarana ceremony or christening took place. Acharya Dikshitar or Acchan Dikshitar was the younger brother of Appayya. Appayya studied the holy scriptures under Guru Rama Kavi. He completed the fourteen Vidyas while he was quite young. What a great marvel!

Chinnabomma, Raja of Vellore, invited Appayya and Acchan Dikshitar to his capital after the death of Rangaraja, who was the Chief Pundit of the State. Srinivasa Thathachari, the Dewan, had great dislike for the worshippers of Lord Siva. He censured the devotees of Lord Siva. Appayya praised the Siva Lilas and the glory of Lord Siva.

Appayya was very intelligent. He was a master logician. He was well-versed in grammar, metaphysics and other sciences. He was a master in all branches of learning. His exposition of Vedanta was unique. He cleared the doubts of all. His name and fame spread far and wide. The Rajas of Thanjavur, Kalahasti and Tirupathi invited him.

Marriage

Ratna Kheta Srinivasa Dikshitar, an erudite scholar in Sanskrit, a devotee of Kamakshi Devi, Kancheepuram, was the Chief Pundit of the Court in the Chola kingdom. The Chola king asked the Pundit, "O Pundit, what is the day today?". The Pundit replied, "Today is Full Moon day". But, really, it was New Moon day. Everybody laughed. Srinivasa Dikshitar felt greatly mortified. He was a true devotee of Kamakshi Devi. Her grace was fully upon him. Srinivasa prayed to Her. The Devi appeared before Srinivasa, gave him one of Her ear-rings and asked him to throw it in the sky. Srinivasa acted accordingly. The ear-ring attained the form of a full moon and shone brilliantly. The king, the ministers and other people witnessed this marvellous scene and were struck with amazement. The king made Srinivasa sit on the golden throne, adorned him with jewels and honoured him highly.

Srinivasa came to know that Appayya was a great scholar. He wanted to defeat him. He proceeded to

Kancheepuram to propitiate Kamakshi Devi in order to get Her blessings. He did severe Tapas. The Devi appeared before him and said, "O Bhakta, choose your boons from Me". Thereupon Srinivasa said, "Let all the Kalas be seated on my tongue. I have to conquer Appayya, who is a great scholar and orator, through Thy grace and help only. The whole world knows my name and fame. Please help me to keep up the same".

The Devi replied, "O Bhakta, Appayya is not an ordinary human being. He is verily the incarnation of Lord Siva. I am verily your form. Do not enter into a controversy with him. Give your daughter Mangalambika in marriage to Appayya and become the revered father-in-law to him. Then only your desire will be fulfilled".

At the same time, Lord Siva appeared in Appayya's dream and said, "O child, go to Kancheepuram. Srinivasa will give his daughter in marriage to you".

Appayya went to Kancheepuram immediately and lived there. Srinivasa took his daughter and reached Appayya's residence. Appayya honoured Srinivasa duly with Arghya, Padya, Asana, etc. Srinivasa said, "The Devi has ordered me to give my daughter in marriage to you. O Appayya, please marry her and attain fame, prosperity and tranquillity".

Appayya married Mangalambika. He led the life of a householder. He gave education to all the students who came to him from different parts of the land. He disseminated Siva Bhakti and sang the praise of Lord Siva. The king learnt Dharma from Appayya. Appayya spread Sanskrit learning far and wide.

Appayya had two daughters. Mangalamba, the younger daughter, was a great devotee of Lord Siva. Neelakanta was Appayya's grandson.

The Soma Yajna sacrifice

Appayya, known also as Dikshitendra, performed Soma Yajna to propitiate Chandramauleswara. He performed the Vajapeya sacrifice in Kancheepuram. Seventeen horses were sacrificed. Some scholars alleged that the sacrifice was an act of violence. But Appayya showed to the audience that the chanting of Vedic hymns and Mantras purified everything and gave salvation to the horses. The spectators saw the horses leaving the gross bodies and ascending to heaven amidst praises by Siddhas, Charanas and Gandharvas. From the sky they praised Appayya and said, "On account of thy grace, we have been fortunate to enter heaven". The doubts of the scholars were removed now.

Several kings came to pay homage to Appayya and to receive his blessings, but Chinnabomma, Raja of Vellore, who was deluded by the evil counsel of his minister Thathacharya, did not come. He later on repented very much for not attending the grand Vajapeya Yajna. Chinnabomma came to know of the extraordinary merits and remarkable spiritual glory of Appayya. He wanted to bring Appayya to his State. He sent several scholars to invite Appayya. Appayya accepted the invitation and went to Vellore. Chinnabomma honoured Appayya. He constructed a hermitage called "*Sarvato Bhadram*" for Appayya. Appayya became the Premier. Thathacharya became very, very jealous of Appayya.

Thathacharya's evil deeds

The Ranis fell ill on account of witchcraft done by some persons through the instigation of Thathacharya. Appayya cured them. Thathacharya troubled Appayya in various ways. He bribed the priest of the Vishnu temple to poison Appayya. The priest mixed the poison in the Charanamrit and gave it to Appayya. Appayya prayed to Lord Hari. The poison was converted into nectar.

Thathacharya planned to kill Appayya. He wrote a letter to Appayya and forged the signature of Chinnabomma. In that letter Chinnabomma requested Appayya to see him at dead of night. Thathacharya ordered the commander to send the soldiers with swords in their hands to kill Appayya. Appayya proceeded to meet the Raja. The soldiers were ready to kill Appayya. As soon as they saw Appayya, they stood rooted to the spot unable to move. They became like pillars, with swords in their hands.

Once Appayya was proceeding to Virinchipuram with his disciples to attend the Margasahaya festival. On the way he was encircled by dacoits set up by Thathacharya. Thathacharya also was in the company of the dacoits. Appayya wanted to teach them a lesson. Sparks of fire came from his eyes and burnt them up. All were reduced to ashes. Then the compassionate Appayya touched the ashes with his hands. All were brought back to life. Thathacharya addressed Appayya thus: "O Lord! I am a great sinner. I have done you great harm. I prostrate at your holy feet. You are my sole refuge. Pardon me and protect me". As Thathacharya surrendered himself at the feet of Appayya, all his sins were wiped away. He became a great friend of Appayya. All his inimical thoughts vanished. Appayya asked Thathacharya to go to Pakshi Tirtha and worship the God there for forty-eight days. Thathacharya acted accordingly. He reconstructed the temple also.

Pilgrimage

Appayya constructed a temple in Adayapalam and installed Kalakanteswara for his daily worship. He went on a pilgrimage and visited Nandi Hills, Madhyarjuna, Panchanadam (Thiruvaiyaru), Madurai, Rameswaram, Sivagangai, Jambukeswaram, Srirangam, Swetharanyam, Kancheepuram, Kashi, Vedaranyam, Mathrubhuteswaram, Chidambaram, Viruddhachalam, Tiruvannamalai, Virinchipuram and other places.

Once Appayya's wife, admirers and pupils requested him to show his real Svarupa. Appayya agreed. He sat on Siddhasana and entered into Samadhi suddenly. A lustrous Purusha, Lord Siva Himself, rose from the body of Appayya. He was adorned with Rudraksha and Vibhuti and bore various divine weapons.

Miracles

Once Appayya was suffering from high fever. The king Chinnabomma came to see Appayya. Appayya transferred his disease to a deer-skin. The deer-skin commenced to shiver with fever. The Raja was struck with intense amazement.

A miracle happened in Kancheepuram. Appayya performed the Pasubandha sacrifice in Kancheepuram. All the Pitambaras and other ornaments which were sacrificed in the sacred fire were seen on the Murti of Varadaraja. The fire in the sacrificial Kund rose up in the sky and proclaimed the glory of Appayya. It presented to Appayya all the Pitambaras which had been sacrificed by him. Narasimha, the King of Thanjavur, and several others witnessed this scene.

Appayya's contemporaries

Sri Ratnaketa Dikshitar, Sarva Bhauma Kavi, Thathacharya, Samarapungava Dikshitar, Narasimhaswami, Doddayacharya, Vijayeendra, Vyasa Bhatta, Parasara Bhatta, Varanandi, Bhattoji, Nilakanta Dikshitar (grandson of Appayya's brother), Guru Rama Kavi, Govinda Dikshitar, Narayana Adhwari, Rajachudamani Dikshitar, Atiratra Yajva, Veeraraghava or Balakavi, Girvana Yogindra (Mantra Guru of Nilakanta Dikshitar), Venkateswara Makhi, etc., were all contemporaries of Appayya.

Last days

Appayya went to Chidambaram and stayed there for some time. He said that his grandson Nilakanta would become minister to the Pandyan king at Madurai and establish Sivadvaita.

On the Chaitra Purnima day of the Margasirsha month, in his seventy-second year, Appayya attained oneness with Nataraja of Chidambaram.

His life and works

Sri Sankaracharya, himself an incarnation of Lord Siva, entered the fourth order of life, viz., Sannyasa, in his early years and taught the people the glory and importance of that order. So also, Srimad Appayya Dikshitar, an Amsavatara of Lord Siva, entered the second order, viz., Grihasthashrama, and taught the people of the world the method of salvation in and through that Grihasthashrama. Sri Sankaracharya, though he followed the Nivritti Marga, did not ignore the Pravritti Marga (the path of action). He says in his *Sadhana Panchaka: "Vedo Nityamadheeyataam Taduditam Karma Swanushteeyataam.* Learn and teach the Vedas and perform Karma in accordance with their injunctions". Even so, Srimad Appayya also did not ignore Nivritti or Sannyasa. He is the famous author of many Vedantic texts which contain the essence of all the Upanishads. He also initiated a number of deserving people in the path of Nivritti, though by example and precept, he favoured more the progressive method of entering the fourth order of life after passing through the second and the third orders.

We find the following quotation in *Sivarahasya* in support of the statement that Sri Sankaracharya was an incarnation of Lord Siva: "*Chaturbhi Saha Sishyaisthu Sankarovatarishyati.* With four disciples Sri Sankara will incarnate". Even so, in the case of Dikshitar also, we find in the same scriptural text: "*Dikshitopi Bhavet Kashchitch Chaivaschandogyavamsaja*".

Various were the reasons and purposes for which Appayya incarnated. The first was the establishment of the Sanatana Dharma as proclaimed in the scriptures through an active following of the four orders beginning with Brahmacharya and through making others follow this righteous course. Spreading the knowledge of Advaita Vedanta was the second. Re-establishment of the supremacy of Advaita philosophy as propounded by Sri Sankara in his Bhashya on the Brahma Sutras of Vyasa, through a critical examination of the Dvaita and the Visishtadvaita schools, was another. Appayya Dikshitar gave a new life and orientation to Saivism in South India. He made people tread the path of devotion. By his own exemplary life he converted atheists, created a strong faith in them in the Vedic injunctions and in devotion to Lord Siva. He did not stop there. He went a step further and proclaimed in his work *Sivarkamani Dipika* that through the grace of the personal God alone could men get a taste for the study of the Vedanta philosophy.

No one has expounded Sri Sankara's philosophy so correctly and with the same force and emphasis as Sri Appayya has done. Sri Appayya has fully conveyed to the readers the thoughts of Sri Sankara in his inexhaustible commentaries on the Brahma Sutras and other Advaitic texts. Those who study Appayya Dikshitar's works in their original Sanskrit version will agree with this statement.

Appayya Dikshitar held an impartial view on other religions and philosophies. A study of his book *Chaturmata Sara Samgraha* shows clearly that he was free from all prejudice towards the other schools of thought, viz., the Dvaita, the Visishtadvaita and the Suddha Advaita schools. Appayya Dikshitar had no prejudice against any Devata either.

The honorific term *Dikshitendra*, without any adjective, connoted Sri Appayya Dikshitar only and none else.

Appayya Dikshitar is the reputed author of more than a hundred and four works, representative of all branches of knowledge in the Sanskrit language and literature. He attained his great fame mainly by his works on Vedanta. All the schools of Vedanta have drawn unique and unrivalled authority and support from his pen. Of his Vedanta works, the *Chaturmata Sara Samgraha* is justly famous for the even-handed justice with which it has expounded the tenets of the four great schools—Dvaita, Visishtadvaita, Sivadvaita and Advaita. In almost all branches of Sanskrit learning and literature—poetry, rhetoric, philosophy, etc.,—Appayya Dikshitar's name was peerless among his contemporaries. For that matter, it was so for decades after him and it is so even today. *Kuvalayananda* of Appayya Dikshitar is generally the first work of rhetoric that is put in the hands of students, although Pundit Jagannatha, his contemporary and rival, levelled some shafts on it in his *Rasagangadhara*. Appayya Dikshitar's poems in praise of Siva are great favourites among the worshippers of Siva. Dikshitar has also written a learned commentary entitled *Parimala* on Vedanta; it is a standing monument of his philosophic erudition.

Appayya Dikshitar was well known as a great controversialist in all domains of knowledge. The distinguishing mark of his greatness was his supreme and unassailable presentation of his opponent's view in the clearest manner possible. And this was achieved in a pre-eminently high degree in *Chaturmata Sara Samgraha*. It contains, in epitome, in four sections, the four schools of Vedanta—the Dvaita, the Visishtadvaita, the Sivadvaita and Advaita. The work is in the form of a running commentary, in prose and in verse, on the Brahma Sutras of Badarayana, treated topically under the several Adhikaranas. In this work, Appayya Dikshitar interprets each school of Vedanta according to the most ardent expounder of that school without in the least disclosing his own personal inclination.

Appayya Dikshitar composed this famous work when he was the court poet of King Chinnabomma.

Each section of the *Chaturmata Sara* is known by an individualistic name also. The section on Dvaita is termed *Nayamuktavali*. The second section on Ramanuja's Visishtadvaita is called *Nayamayukhamalika*. The third section is on Srikanta's system and is called *Nayamanimala*. The fourth section is an exposition of Sri Sankara's Advaita system and is called *Nayamanjari*.

Appayya Dikshitar's masterly works, *Sivarkamani Dipika* and *Parimala*, dealing with Sivadvaita and Advaita, speak of Appayya's distinguished ability in expounding both the philosophies. Here he opposes strongly both the Dvaita and the Visishtadvaita schools in unmistakable terms. His *Madhavatantramukha Mardana* is a highly provocative work criticising the tenets of the Dvaita schools; and in his *Ramanujasringabhanga*, he controverts the doctrines of Ramanuja with a masterly thoroughness which is all his own. At the same time, Appayya has written works like *Nayamuktavali* and *Nayamayukhamalika* which portray the respective systems even better than their own adherents have ever done. This is sufficient proof of Sri Appayya's genius. Appayya could hold his own, and at the same time, expound his opponent's point of view in the most unprejudiced and authoritative manner.

The *Nayamanjari* is fully composed in verse, each Adhikarana of the Brahma Sutras being represented by at least two Slokas, one putting forth the Purva Paksha and the other the Siddhanta. Appayya Dikshitar has followed Sri Sankara closely in his commentary. The distinguishing feature and merit of the *Nayamanjari* lies in the 386 stanzas of the work being composed in more than 182 different metres, many of which are rare and not easily met with in standard works.

Appayya Dikshitar was a mighty intellect. Great is the reverence paid to him even now. In his own time he was equally revered. Once he went to the village which was the birthplace of his wife. A grand reception was accorded to him by the villagers who were proud of calling him as one of themselves. There was great excitement. "The great Dikshitar is coming amongst us." There was no other talk among the villagers for many days before Dikshitar's expected arrival. At last the great day came and the distinguished guest—Dikshitar—was greeted by crowds of people who flocked to have a sight of the grand lion. An old dame, curious to a degree, came out staff in hand, to see the phenomenon; with the freedom that is conceded to one of her age, she made her way easily through the crowd and looked at him steadily for some minutes. Dim recollections of a face floated in her mind. Definitely recalling the face she said: "I have seen this face somewhere. Wait. Oh yes, are you not the husband of Achha?". The great scholar confirmed her surmise with a smile. The good old lady was disappointed; with her face and spirits fallen, she retraced her steps homeward remarking, "What ado to make! Just Achha's husband!". Appayya summarised a world of wisdom when he perpetuated the incident in a half-verse—"*Asmin Grame Achha Prasiddha.* In this village, the name and precedence are Achha's".

Appayya Dikshitar is considered as an Avatar of Lord Siva. When he went to the Tirupathi temple in South India, the Vaishnavas refused him admission. The next morning they found the Vishnu Murti in the temple changed into Siva Murti. The Mahant was much astonished and startled, and he asked pardon of Appayya Dikshitar and prayed to him to change the idol again into Vishnu Murti.

Dikshitar was a great rival of Panditaraja Jagannatha in the field of poetry. Appayya had no independent views on the doctrinal side of Sankara-Vedanta, but carried on fierce controversies with the followers of Vallabha at Jaipur and other places. *Siddhantalesha*, written by Appayya Dikshitar, is a most admirable digest of the doctrinal differences among the followers of Sankara. No doubt, Appayya Dikshitar is among the greatest spiritual luminaries India has ever produced. Though a detailed account of his life history is not available, his works are sufficient testimony to his greatness.

After Sri Sankara, the world has not seen a genius—a Yogi, Bhakta and scholar—like Sri Appayya.

Glory to Appayya Dikshitar, the incarnation of Lord Siva! May His blessings be upon you all!

SADASIVA BRAHMAN

Sadasivendra Sarasvati was a Sannyasin of great reputation, a born Siddha, who lived in Southern India in the beginning of the eighteenth century. He lived near the town of Karur in the district of Tiruchirapalli. He was popularly known as Sadasiva Brahman.

Sadasiva was a Telugu Brahmin by birth. He was born of Somanatha Yogi and his wife Santha at Madurai. His name was Sivaramakrishna. He was a very brilliant student. He became well versed in Sanskrit. He gained profound knowledge in Prasthanatraya and in the six schools of philosophy. He studied Vedanta under Ramabhadra Shastri in Thiruvisanallur.

Sadasiva was married while yet a student. Once news reached Sadasiva's mother that her son's wife had attained puberty. So she started cooking some extra nice preparations for the day. Sadasiva returned from his teacher's house. He had to wait for two hours for his meals. He thought within himself, "The life of a householder is very miserable indeed! I have not yet started my married life and yet I have to fast for two hours today. This is the beginning of the miseries of my married life. This gives me a rough idea of the future miseries I will have to undergo in married life. Enough, enough". He then determined not to enter the Grihastha Ashrama and left the house in search of a Guru.

Sadasiva's Guru was Parama Sivendra Sarasvati. Sadasiva practised Yoga under his guidance. He entered into heated debates with the people. Some people made a report of this to his Guru. Parama Sivendra Sarasvati said, "O Sadasiva, when will you shut up your mouth?". Immediately Sadasiva took a vow of lifelong silence and wandered about as an itinerant mendicant or Paramahamsa for some time.

Later on, Sadasiva lived on the beautiful banks of the Amaravathi and the Cauvery in Coimbatore district. He spent much of his time in meditation.

Once, while meditating on the sandy banks of the Cauvery, Sadasiva entered into Samadhi. Suddenly there was a flood in the river which carried him away and buried him under the sands. After the rainy season was over, a labourer dug a pit on the bank. His spade was covered with blood. He was struck with wonder. He, with the help of some of his friends, dug out a very deep pit round the spot. He found buried deep in the sand Sadasiva Brahman. He shook the Yogi several times and brought him back to consciousness. Sadasiva Brahman looked around him as if he had just awakened from deep sleep and walked away quietly as if nothing had happened.

Sadasiva Brahman had no consciousness of his body. He moved about in a nude state. Once he entered the tent of a Nawab in a naked condition. There were Zenana ladies in the tent. The Nawab became very furious, took his sword and cut off one of the arms of Sadasiva. The sage was not at all affected by this cruel act of the Nawab. He did not even take notice that his arm had been cut off. He continued with his wanderings as usual. The Nawab was struck with wonder. He knew at once that the nude man must be a great saint. He followed Sadasiva wherever he went. After several days the sage noticed that a Mohammedan was following him. Sadasiva asked the Mohammedan, "Why do you follow me?". The Nawab replied, "Venerable sage! I have committed a serious crime. Please forgive me". Sadasiva said, "Well sir, you have not done me anything. May I know what crime you have committed?". The Nawab said, "Revered saint! You entered my tent in a nude state when I was in the company of my wife and daughters. I became extremely angry and chopped off one of your arms. I did not know that you were a great saint". Then only Sadasiva came to know that one of his arms had been cut off. This clearly shows that he was above body-consciousness when his arm was chopped off. Sadasiva touched the maimed arm with the other arm. He immediately regained the whole arm. What a great miracle! The Nawab was struck with amazement and implored the sage to bless him. Sadasiva blessed the Nawab and continued with his usual wanderings. Saints do not bear any ill-will even towards those who persecute them. They are oceans of mercy. They bless even those people who are ready to take away their lives.

Children used to play with Sadasiva. One day they said to the sage: "Swami, take us to Madurai. We wish to see the grand festival in the temple tonight". Sadasiva made signs to the children to mount his head, back and shoulders. The children immediately found themselves in Madurai, before the temple. They enjoyed the festival. Sadasiva Brahman brought them back to their homes before daybreak.

Once some people came to beat Sadasiva Brahman with sticks in their hands. They were not able to move their hands. In Chidambaram, Sadasiva drank molasses in a boiling condition. He brought back to life a girl who died of cobra-bite in Tiruchendur.

It was usual for Sadasiva to be seen by the people simultaneously in several places.

Sadasiva has written many books in Sanskrit. Of these, the *Brahma Sutra Vritti* is the most important. He has written Dipikas for twelve Upanishads. *Advaita Rasamanjari, Atma Vidya Vilasa, Siddhanta Kalpa Valli, Suta Samhitasaram, Yoga Sutra Vritti,* etc., are his minor works. *Atma Vidya Vilasa* is a small poem of sixty-two verses. In this book there is a description of the greatness of the Yogi who has attained Self-realisation. The book is very charming and of absorbing interest. Sadasiva's writings inspire the readers and elevate them to lofty heights of divine splendour and glory.

Sadasiva told the Brahmins of Nerur, a village near Karur, that he would enter into Samadhi on a particular day and that a Brahmin from Kashi would bring a Bana-linga which should be installed in a temple by the side of his Samadhi. The Brahmins accordingly dug a pit for the sage and waited for the particular day. To their great astonishment, a Brahmin did come from Kashi with a Bana-linga. Sadasiva Brahman descended into the pit, entered into Nirvikalpa Samadhi and merged himself in Para Brahman, the Light of lights. The Brahmins made the necessary Puja or worship for the Samadhi and erected a temple with the Bana-linga by the side of his Samadhi. Even now thousands of people visit the Samadhi every year and attend the anniversary which is celebrated on a grand scale. Sadasiva Brahman entered into Samadhi simultaneously at Nerur, Kashi, Onkar and Kancheepuram.

Sadasiva Brahman was a great Siddha, a perfect sage and a full-blown Yogi—a rare combination, a rare spiritual crest-jewel. He was an Avadhuta. He was an Ativarnashrami and did not observe caste differences. He used to take food from the hands of anyone. He had equal vision. He saw the one Self everywhere. He roamed about wherever he liked. He was absolutely fearless and desireless and never cared for worldly riches. He was an Emperor of emperors, a King of kings, a Yogi of Yogis. He was a torch-bearer of wisdom, a magnificent beacon-light for the aspirants.

APPAYYACHARYA

Appayyacharya, also known as Appayya Sivam, was born about the year 1830 at Pattamadai. He was the grandson of Pannai Subbbaier, a great landlord and elder brother of P.S. Vengu Iyer, father of Dr. P.V. Kuppuswami Iyer. He had a beautiful complexion and a majestic personality. He was tall, stalwart and broad-built.

Appayyacharya was a great scholar in Sanskrit. He was an Anubhava Jnani, a realised sage, a great Bhakta of Lord Siva. He wrote several books on religion and philosophy, and commentaries on the Gita, the Upanishads and the Brahma Sutras.

Late Krishna Sastrigal of the Theosophical Society, Adyar, editor of "*Heritage*", Bombay, was one of Appayyacharya's disciples. He published several of Appayyacharya's writings in his monthly journal. "*Kalyana Kalpataru*" published a short life-sketch of Appayyacharya.

Appayyacharya was an introvert. He lived in Narayanammalpuram, on the banks of the river Tambraparani, for several years and spent his time in rigorous meditation. He exercised a tremendous spiritual influence over a vast number of people. He avoided publicity and lived in seclusion always. He did not like to come to limelight. He embraced poverty, though his admirers, disciples and devotees were very rich. Sometimes he would go out for Unchavritti and Kirtans. He shone like Lord Siva. His Sanskrit songs touched the hearts of all.

Appayyacharya was a genius like Sankara. He was as reputed as Raju Sastrigal of Mannargudi and Appayya Dikshitar of Adayapalam. His knowledge of the sacred scriptures was very profound. People from various quarters came to consult him on controversial religious points and on Dharma.

Appayyacharya entered into Mahasamadhi at the age of 70, about the year 1900.

Glory to Appayyacharya, a genius, a seer, a Bhakta, a sage, a great writer, a poet and a Maharshi.

May his blessing be upon you all!

POTANA

Potana lived between 1400 A.D. and 1475 A.D. in a village called Ontimitta in Cudappah District, Andhra Pradesh. He was originally an illiterate without any formal schooling. While grazing cattle in the fields one day, Yogi Jitananda met him and initiated him. By the Yogi's blessings Potana got his intellectual awakening along with spiritual knowledge.

Potana is held in great esteem and reverence all over the Telugu country. Potana's *Bhagavatam* is a famous book. It is written in Telugu verse. *Narayana Satakam, Bhoginidandakam* and *Virabhadra Vijayam* are the other works of Potana.

Potana was born in a poor Brahmin family. His father's name was Kesana. Lakshmamma was the mother of Potana. Though Potana was poor, he entertained his guests wholeheartedly. He was quite indifferent to his bodily comforts.

Potana was a poet-saint. He was a devotee of Lord Rama. He was an ideal Bhakta. Lord Rama Himself appeared before Potana and ordered him to write the Bhagavatam in Telugu.

Srinatha, the great Pundit and State poet, was the cousin of Potana. One day he went in a palanquin to see Potana. Potana was sitting in his fields and writing the Bhagavatam and his son Mallana was busy at the plough. Srinatha asked the palanquin-bearers in front to leave off the palanquin. He showed to Potana that he could make the palanquin go as usual. Potana asked his son to unyoke the bull on one side of the yoke. The plough went on as usual with only one bull. Srinatha next asked the bearers at the back to give up the palanquin. The palanquin moved as usual. Potana asked his son to unyoke the other bull also. The plough went on as usual. Srinatha asked Potana to pardon him for his arrogance and presumptuousness.

Srinatha suggested that Potana should dedicate his *Bhagavatam* to the king and get a decent reward, which would remove his poverty. Potana did not give a definite reply. He kept silent.

Srinatha informed the king that Potana had consented to dedicate his Bhagavatam to him. The king was very much delighted when he heard this happy news. He anxiously awaited the arrival of Potana. But Potana never turned up.

Potana considered the reward of the king as mere straw and dedicated his book to Lord Rama Himself. The king was greatly enraged. He persecuted Potana in diverse ways. The king sent several soldiers to capture Potana. The Lord assumed the form of a boar and killed all the soldiers. The king ordered his servants to set fire to Potana's house. But Sri Hanuman guarded Potana's house and Lord Vishnu's Chakra guarded Potana's book. The king's palace went up in flames.

Potana was driven away from the village. The king lost his wealth and kingdom. He then repented very much for all his inhuman acts. He recalled Potana, implored pardon and conferred on him riches and presented to him his native village.

Srinatha made some comments on that chapter of *Bhagavatam* which dealt with the rescue of Gajendra. He asked how Lord Hari could proceed to save Gajendra without His conch. Potana taught Srinatha a lesson. He concealed Srinatha's son in a safe place and told Srinatha, when the latter was taking his food, that his son had fallen into a well.

Srinatha gave up his meal and ran to the well without washing his hands. Potana said to Srinatha, "How can you save the child without a rope or any other thing?". He then informed him that his son was quite safe and that he wanted to make him understand that the anxiety of the Lord was even greater than what he felt at the news of his son's fall into the well; and in that state, the thoughts of the means for rescue did not arise. This touched the heart of Srinatha. He leant a good lesson and became a devotee of the Lord.

Potana spent the rest of his life in the service of the Lord and attained the region of eternal bliss.

Women Saints

MADALASA

Madalasa was a Jnani. She converted all her sons into Jnanis. When she was rocking the cradle of her children, she used to sing, "*Suddhosi, Buddhosi, Niranjanosi, Samsaramaya Parivarjitosi*. O child, thou art pure, all-knowing, spotless and free from the trammels of births and deaths". The children imbibed, along with the milk of the mother, the Vedantic teachings also and became sages in course of time.

All women should follow the footprints of Madalasa and train their children in the path of truth and righteousness.

MIRA BAI

Mira is regarded as an incarnation of Radha. She was born in Samvat 1557 or 1499 A.D. in the village Kurkhi, near Merta, a small state in Marwar, Rajasthan. Mira was the daughter of Ratan Singh Ranthor and the grand-daughter of Dudaji of Merta. The Ranthors of Merta were great devotees of Vishnu. Mira Bai was brought up amidst Vaishnava influence, which moulded her life in the path of devotion towards Lord Krishna. She learnt to worship Sri Krishna from her childhood. When she was four years of age, she manifested religious tendencies. Once there was a marriage procession in front of her residence. The bridegroom was nicely dressed. Mira, who was only a child, saw the bridegroom and said to her mother innocently, "Dear mother, who is *my* bridegroom?". Mira's mother smiled, and half in jest and half in earnest, pointed towards the image of Sri Krishna and said, "My dear Mira, Lord Krishna—this beautiful image—is your bridegroom".

Child Mira began to love the idol of Krishna very much. She spent much of her time in bathing and dressing the image. She worshipped the image. She slept with the image. She danced about the image in ecstasy. She sang beautiful songs in front of the image. She used to talk to the idol.

Mira's father arranged for her marriage with Rana Kumbha of Chitore, in Mewar. Mira was a very dutiful wife. She obeyed her husband's commands implicitly. After her household duties were over, she would go to the temple of Lord Krishna, worship, sing and dance before the image daily. The little image would get up, embrace Mira, play on the flute and talk to her. Rana's mother and other ladies of the house did not like the ways of Mira, as they were worldly-minded and jealous. They were all annoyed with her. Mira's mother-in-law forced her to worship Durga and admonished her often. But Mira stood adamant. She said, "I have already given up my life to my beloved Lord Krishna". Mira's sister-in-law

Udabai formed a conspiracy and began to defame the innocent Mira. She informed Rana Kumbha that Mira was in secret love with others, that she with her own eyes had witnessed Mira in the temple with her lovers, and that she would show him the persons if he would accompany her one night. She further added that Mira, by her conduct, had brought a great slur on the reputation of the Rana family of Chitore. Rana Kumbha was very much enraged. He straightaway ran with sword in hand towards the inner apartments of Mira. Fortunately, Mira was not in her room. A kind relative of the Rana checked him and said, "Look here Rana! Do not be in haste. You will repent later on. Consider well. Enquire into the matter very carefully. Find out the truth. Mira is a great devotional lady. What you have heard now may be a wild rumour only. Out of sheer jealousy some ladies might have concocted a cock-and-bull story against Mira to ruin her. Be cool now". Rana Kumbha agreed to the wise counsel of his relative. The Rana's sister took him to the temple at dead of night. Rana Kumbha broke open the door, rushed inside and found Mira alone in her ecstatic mood talking to the idol.

The Rana said to Mira, "Mira, with whom are you talking now? Show me this lover of yours". Mira replied, "There sits He—my Lord—the Nanichora who has stolen my heart". She fainted. There was a wild rumour that Mira was mixing very freely with Sadhus. She, no doubt, had great regard for Sadhus and mixed freely with them. Mira never cared a bit for the meaningless scandals. She stood unruffled.

Mira was persecuted in various ways by the Rana and his relatives. She got the same treatment which Prahlad got from his father Hiranyakasipu. Hari shielded Prahlad. Here, Sri Krishna always stood by the side of Mira. Once the Rana sent a cobra in a basket to Mira with the message that it contained a garland of flowers. Mira took her bath and sat for worship. After finishing her meditation, she opened the basket and found inside a lovely idol of Sri Krishna and a garland of flowers. Then the Rana sent her a cup of poison with the message that it was nectar. Mira offered it to Lord Krishna and took it as His Prasad. It was real nectar to her. Then the Rana sent a bed of nails for Mira to sleep on. Mira finished her worship and slept on the bed of nails. Lo! The bed of nails was transformed into a bed of roses.

When Mira was thus tortured by her husband's relatives, she sent a letter to Tulsidasji and asked the advice of the saint. She wrote thus: "All my relatives trouble me, because I move amongst Sadhus. I cannot carry on my devotional practices in the house. I have made Giridhar Gopal my friend from my very childhood. I am strongly attached to Him. I cannot break that attachment now".

Tulsidasji sent a reply: "Abandon those who do not worship Rama and Sita as if they are your enemies, even though they are your dearest relatives. Prahlad abandoned his father; Vibhishana left his brother Ravana; Bharata deserted his mother; Bali forsook even his Guru; the Gopis, the women of Vraja, disowned their husbands in order to attain the Lord. Their lives were all the happier for having done so. The opinion of holy saints is that the relation with God and love of God alone is true and eternal; all other relationships are unreal and temporary".

Once Akbar and his court musician Tansen came in disguise to Chitore to hear Mira's devotional and inspiring songs. Both entered the temple and listened to Mira's soul-stirring songs to their heart's content. Akbar was really moved. Before he departed, he touched the holy feet of Mira and placed a necklace of emeralds in front of the idol as a present. Somehow the news reached the Rana that Akbar had entered the temple in disguise, touched the feet of Mira and even presented her a necklace. The Rana became furious. He told Mira, "Drown yourself in the river and never show your face to the world in future. You have brought great disgrace on my family".

Mira obeyed the words of her husband. She proceeded to the river to drown herself. The names of the Lord "*Govind, Giridhari, Gopal*" were always on her lips. She sang and danced in ecstasy on her way to the river. When she raised her feet from the ground, a hand from behind grasped her. She turned behind and saw her beloved Krishna. She fainted. After a few minutes she opened her eyes. Lord Krishna smiled and spoke to her these words: "My dear Mira, your life with this mortal husband is over now. You are absolutely free. Be cheerful. You are Mine. Immediately proceed to the bowers of Vraja and the avenues of Brindavan. Seek Me there, my child. Be quick". He then disappeared.

Mira obeyed the divine call immediately. She walked barefoot on the hot sandy beds of Rajasthan. On her way, she was received by many ladies, children and devotees with great hospitality. She reached Brindavan. She found out her Flute-bearer there. She went about Brindavan begging for her food and worshipped in the *Govinda Mandir* which has since become famous and is now a place of pilgrimage. Her devotees of Chitore came to Brindavan to see Mira. Rana Kumbha came to Mira in the disguise of a mendicant, revealed himself and repented for his previous wrongs and cruel deeds. Mira at once prostrated before her husband.

Jiva Gosain was the head of the Vaishnavites in Brindavan. Mira wanted to have Darshan of Jiva Gosain. He declined to see her. He sent word to Mira that he would not allow any woman in his presence. Mira Bai retorted: "Everybody in Brindavan is a woman. Only Giridhar Gopal is Purusha. Today only I have come to know that there is another Purusha besides Krishna in Brindavan". Jiva Gosain was put to shame. He thought that Mira was a great devotional lady. He at once went to see Mira and paid her due respects.

Mira's fame spread far and wide. So many princesses and queens have come and gone. So many Ranis, Kumaris and Maharanis have appeared on the stage of this world and vanished. How is it that the queen of Chitore alone is still remembered? Is this on account of her beauty? Is this on account of her poetic skill? No. It is on account of her renunciation, one-pointed devotion to Lord Krishna and God-realisation. She came face to face with Krishna. She conversed with Krishna. She ate with Krishna—her Beloved. She drank the Krishna-prema-rasa. She has sung from the core of her heart the music of her soul, the music of her Beloved, her unique spiritual experiences. And she has sung songs of surrender and Prem.

Mira had the beautiful cosmic vision. She saw Krishna in the tree, in the stone, in the creeper, in the flower, in the bird, in all beings—in everything. As long as there is the name of Krishna, there will be the name of Mira also.

It is extremely difficult to find a parallel to this wonderful personality—Mira—a saint, a philosopher, a poet and a sage. She was a versatile genius and a magnánimous soul. Her life has a singular charm, with extraordinary beauty and marvel. She was a princess, but she abandoned the pleasures and luxuries incident to her high station, and chose instead, a life of poverty, austerity, Tyaga, Titiksha and Vairagya. Though she was a delicate young lady, she entered the perilous journey on the spiritual path amidst various difficulties. She underwent various ordeals with undaunted courage and intrepidity. She stood adamant in her resolve. She had a gigantic will.

Mira's songs infuse faith, courage, devotion and love of God in the minds of the readers. They inspire the aspirants to take to the path of devotion and they produce in them a marvellous thrill and a melting of the heart.

Mira's earthly life was full of troubles and difficulties. She was persecuted. She was tormented and yet she kept up an undaunted spirit and a balanced mind all through, by the strength of her devotion and the grace of her beloved Krishna. Though she was a princess, she begged alms and lived sometimes on water alone. She led a life of perfect renunciation and self-surrender.

Mira had Raganuga or Ragatmika Bhakti. She never cared for public criticism and the injunctions of the Shastras. She danced in the streets. She did no ritualistic worship. She had spontaneous love for Lord Krishna. She did not practise Sadhana-bhakti. From her very childhood she poured forth her love on Lord Krishna. Krishna was her husband, father, mother, friend, relative and Guru. Krishna was her Prananath. Mira had finished the preliminary modes of worship in her previous birth.

Mira was fearless in her nature, simple in her habits, joyous in her disposition, amiable in her deportment, graceful in her behaviour and elegant in her demeanour. She immersed herself in the love of Giridhar Gopal. The name of Giridhar

Gopal was always on her lips. Even in her dreams, she lived and had her being in Sri Krishna.

In her divine intoxication, Mira danced in public places. She had no sex-idea. Her exalted state could not be adequately described in words. She was sunk in the ocean of Prem. She had no consciousness of her body and surroundings. Who could gauge the depth of her devotion? Who could understand her internal Premamaya state of Maha-bhava? Who could measure the capacity of her large heart?

Mira wafted the fragrance of devotion far and wide. Those who came in contact with her were affected by her strong current of Prem. Mira was like Lord Gauranga. She was an embodiment of love and innocence. Her heart was the temple of devotion. Her face was the lotus-flower of Prem. There was kindness in her look, love in her talk, joy in her discourses, power in her speech and fervour in her songs. What a marvellous lady! What a wonderful personality!. What a charming figure!

Mira's mystic songs act as a soothing balm to the wounded hearts and tired nerves of those who toil in this world with the heavy burden of life. The sweet music of her songs exerts a benign influence on the hearers, removes discord and disharmony, and lulls them to sleep. Mira's language of love is so powerful that even a downright atheist will be moved by her devotional songs.

Mira acted her part well on the stage of the world. She taught the world the way to love God. She rowed her boat dexterously in a stormy sea of family troubles and difficulties and reached the other shore of supreme peace and absolute fearlessness—the kingdom of supreme love. She belonged to the gentle fair sex and yet how undaunted in spirit and how courageous she was! Though she was young, she bore the persecutions silently. She endured the piercing taunts and sarcastic criticisms of the world bravely. She has left an indelible impression on the world and her name will be handed down to posterity.

From Brindavan, Mira proceeded to Dwaraka. There she was absorbed in the image of Lord Krishna at the temple of Ranchod.

SAKUBAI

Krar is a village on the banks of the Krishna in Maharashtra. There lived in the village a Brahmin with his wife, son and daughter-in-law. The name of the daughter-in-law was Sakubai.

Sakubai was a great devotee of Lord Krishna of Pandharpur. The Name of the Lord was always on her lips. She was obedient, humble, simple, and virtuous. Her mother-in-law was cruel, egoistic and stone-hearted. The Brahmin and his son were entirely in the hands of that woman. They treated Sakubai very harshly.

Sakubai discharged her household duties well. She worked very hard and yet the mother-in-law abused and kicked her. She never gave Sakubai a full meal. Sakubai had to eat stale things. She bore everything very patiently. She never opened her lips. She could not open her heart to her husband as he was under the control of his mother. Sakubai was always cheerful. She reflected within herself thus: "I am highly grateful to the Lord, because if I had been placed in prosperous conditions, I would have forgotten Him".

A woman in the neighbouring house one day said to Sakubai, "My dear sister, I pity you. Have you not got your parents? How is it that none of them ever turns up to see you?". Sakubai smiled and said, "My parents live in Pandharpur. Lord Krishna is my father. Rukmini is my mother. They have countless children. So they have forgotten me. But I am sure they will come to me one day and remove my difficulties".

Pandharpur is a sacred place of pilgrimage. A big fair is held there on the eleventh day of the moon in Ashada. People from various places assemble there to get Darshan of Lord Vittala. Devotees of the Lord, with small flags in their hands, proceed to Pandharpur through the village Krar. They chant the Lord's Name, play on their cymbals and guitars and dance.

Sakubai saw a party of devotees. She had a strong desire to visit Pandharpur along with that party. It was not possible for her to get permission from her people, but she joined the party.

A woman of the neighbouring house who saw Sakubai joining the party at once reported to her mother-in-law. The mother-in-law asked her son to bring Sakubai back to the house. The son caught hold of Sakubai's hair and dragged her to the house. He abused her and kicked her several times on the way.

The Brahmin, his wife and his son tied Sakubai to a pillar with a strong rope. Sakubai prayed to the Lord: "O Vittala of Pandharpur, I wanted to tie myself to Thy lotus feet, but I am tied here with a rope. My body is tied up here, but my mind is ever free. My mind is ever fixed at Thy lotus feet. I am afraid neither of death nor of bodily tortures. I wish to have Thy Darshan at any cost. Thou art my Father, Mother, Guru, Protector—my All. O Merciful Lord, will You not grant my humble prayer?".

If the prayer comes from the core of the heart, it is heard by the Lord. He responds to the prayer immediately. The prayer of Sakubai pierced the heart of Lord Krishna. He was moved at once. He took the form of a woman, appeared immediately before Sakubai and said, "Beloved sister, I am going to Pandharpur, will you not go there?". Sakubai said, "How can I go when I am tied to the pillar? Certainly I have a strong desire to go there".

The woman said, "Dear sister, I am your friend. I will get myself tied up here in your place. You can go now to Pandharpur". She removed the rope, let Sakubai free and tied herself up in Sakubai's place. Sakubai was at Pandharpur in a moment through the grace of the Lord. Her joy knew no bounds. She thought within herself, "I am truly blessed by the Lord. I am freed not only from the bond of the rope, but also from the bonds of life. How happy I am!".

The Lord assumed the form of Sakubai and became a slave of His devotee. The Lord of the three worlds, the chanting of whose Name loosens all the bonds of Maya, was Himself that day in bondage, because of the love of a devotee.

How merciful He is! The Brahmin, his wife and his son abused the new Sakubai, but the Lord rejoiced.

Fifteen days passed. The new Sakubai was not given even a morsel of food. The husband began to feel a little. He thought within himself: "If she dies, all the people will abuse me. I cannot get another wife, because all know that my parents are cruel". He took pity on her and repented very much for his cruel action. He untied her and said, "Dear Saku, I have treated you cruelly. My parents too have given you lots of trouble. Now, please forgive us, take bath and take your meals". The new Sakubai (the Lord) put her head down and heard all this like a devoted wife. The Lord thought that if he disappeared earlier, those people would treat the real Sakubai on her return in a worse manner. So He decided to stay and serve the family like Sakubai.

Sakubai took her bath and prepared delicious food. All the three took their meals. Saku took her food in the end. They all admired Saku's great skill in cooking. It was the first time that Saku took the same food as was taken by them. Saku massaged the feet of the mother-in-law and discharged the other duties very satisfactorily. Now the Brahmin, his wife and the son were highly pleased with Saku.

The real Sakubai reached Pandharpur, took bath in the Chandrabhaga and had Darshan of Vittala or Lord Krishna. She took the vow of never going away from Pandharpur. She was immersed in divine bliss. She lost all consciousness, dropped down and was dead.

A Brahmin of village Kiwal, which was near to the village Krar, was present in the temple. He recognized Sakubai, took her dead body with the help of his friends and cremated it.

Rukmini, the consort of Lord Krishṇa, was in a great dilemma. Her Lord was at Krar. He was acting the part of Sakubai, who was dead and whose body was already cremated. Rukmini thought within herself: "How can I get my Lord back from Krar?". She created a new Sakubai through her Yogic power.

The new Sakubai had a dream. Rukmini said to Sakubai in her dream, "Dear Saku, you took a vow not to leave

Pandharpur. Well, the body in which you took the vow has already been cremated. I have given you a new body. Go back to your village. The Lord has blest you".

Sakubai returned to her village. She met her sister on the river bank and said to her, "Dear sister, I had Darshan of the Lord through your help only. I am grateful to you. How can I repay you for all that you have done for me?".

The Lord handed over the pitcher to Saku, told her to carry water to her house and went away. Saku returned to her house with the pitcher of water and began to do the household work as usual. She was very much astonished to find a great change in the attitude of her mother-in-law, her father-in-law and her husband towards her.

The next day, the Brahmin of Kiwal village came to Krar to announce the news of the death of Sakubai. He found that Sakubai was doing her household duties. He was struck with wonder. He said to Sakubai's father-in-law, "Your daughter-in-law died at Pandharpur. My friends and I cremated her body. I think that her ghost is moving about in your house".

The father-in-law and the husband of Sakubai said, "Saku has been here all the time. She never went to Pandharpur. You might have cremated the body of some other woman".

The Brahmin of Kiwal village said, "Now call your daughter-in-law and enquire from her whether she had gone to Pandharpur or not".

The Brahmin said, "O dear Saku, tell me the truth. Do not be afraid. Did you go to Pandharpur? Tell me what all happened".

Saku replied, "I had a strong desire to go to Pandharpur. When I was tied to the pillar, a woman, who resembled me very much, came to me, untied me, put herself in my place and asked me to go to Pandharpur. I did go to Pandharpur. I lost my consciousness before the image of Lord Vittala. In my dream Rukmini said, 'Your body was cremated. I have given you a new body and a new life. Go to your native place'. I came back and met the woman at the riverside. She gave me the pitcher to carry home and went away. I am quite sure that the woman was Lord Krishna Himself—Lord Panduranga. You people are all blessed, as you had Darshan of the Lord".

The Brahmin, his wife and their son thought that the woman must have been assuredly the Lord of Pandharpur. They grieved very much for their wrong actions done to the Lord. All the three were purified by their contact with the Lord. Their heart was changed. They began to worship the Lord with great devotion. They said, "O Lord, forgive us. We had treated brutally Thy devotee Sakubai. We had ill-treated Thee also. O Lord of Compassion! Pardon us. We prostrate at Thy lotus feet. Save us. Protect us".

They began to worship Sakubai also.

MUKTABAI

Nivrittinath, Jnanadev, Sopan and Muktabai were the four children of Vittalpanth and Rukmabai. They lived in Alandi near Pune. Nivritti is regarded as the incarnation of Lord Siva, Jnanadev as the incarnation of Sri Krishna, Sopan as the incarnation of Brahma and Muktabai as the incarnation of Sarasvati or Adi-sakti.

Vittalpanth was a seeker after Truth even from a very young age. He left his house, went to Kashi and took Sannyasa. The Guru of Vittalpanth came to know that Vittalpanth was a married man and had a young wife. He ordered Vittalpanth to go back to his village and lead the life of a householder. Vittalpanth came back to his village and lived with his wife and had four children. The people of the village treated Vittalpanth and his children with contempt. They treated them very badly. The parents died of a broken heart. The children became orphans at a very early age.

Nivrittinath brought up his younger brothers and sister. Gahininath was the Guru of Nivritti. Nivritti was the Guru of Jnanadev. Jnanadev was the Guru of Sopan and Muktabai. All were devoted to Lord Vittala of Pandharpur. They were holy and pious.

The eldest son Nivritti had to be invested with the sacred thread. As he was the son of a Sannyasin, the Brahmins declined to perform the Yajnopavita ceremony. Jnanadev opened the eyes of the Brahmins from their delusion by placing his hands on a buffalo and making it recite the Vedas. He showed them that real Brahminism did not rest on any set ritual or dogma, but only on purity of heart and virtuous character.

Once Chang Dev went to see the reputed brothers, riding on a tiger. Jnanadev was equal to the occasion. He was a Yogi. To receive Chang Dev he made his house move along with his brothers and sister. Chang Dev put down his head in shame and acknowledged the merits of Jnanadev. Jnanadev attained *Sajiva Samadhi* in his twenty-first year. He shut himself in a cave and took the Prana to Brahmarandhra. His *Jnaneswari*, a commentary on the Gita, will live for all time.

Muktabai remained a virgin all her life. She attained perfection. She was the Guru of Chang Dev. Muktabai and her three brothers were sitting in the Ashram. Chang Dev came that way. Muktabai was fully clad, but she appeared to Chang Dev as in a nude state. At once Chang Dev turned away. Muktabai told him that he was not perfect as he had the sex-idea and the feeling of shame, and as he did not see God in every being. Chang Dev learnt a great lesson from Muktabai and eradicated his weakness through intense Sadhana.

There was once a great assemblage of devotees in the temple of Pandharpur. Chang Dev, Gorakumbar, Rohidas, Namdev, Chokamela, Savta and many other saints were present. Muktabai wanted to put Namdev in the path of knowledge. She asked the potter Gorakumbar to test all the saints who assembled there whether they were perfect. The potter's test is to tap the pots in order to find out if they are well baked. Gorakumbar tapped the head of all, but when he came to Namdev and tapped his head, the latter cried. At once Gorakumbar said, "This pot is not well baked".

Namdev ran to Lord Krishna and told him of what had happened in the assembly. Sri Krishna said, "Yes, Namdev, you are Kachcha, ill-baked. You have not attained the highest realisation. Go to Kecharswami and get initiation".

Muktabai enlightened thousands of persons during a period of eight years after which she reached the abode of eternal bliss.

RABIA

Hazrat Rabia was a great woman-saint of Islam. She had intense devotion to the Lord. She was pure and pious. She performed great penance. Her heart burned with the fire of divine love. She lost herself in union with the Divine. She had devotion from her early youth.

Rabia was born at Basra in 717 A.D. She was born in a poor family. She had three elder sisters. The parents died in a famine soon after her birth. Rabia was caught hold of by a man who sold her in slavery to a rich man.

While Rabia was walking in the street in her early youth, a man approached her. She ran away, fell down and broke her wrist. She bowed her head in the dust and said, "O Lord! I am without father and mother. I am an orphan. I am poor. I am a slave. My wrist is broken. And yet I am not grieved by all these. I only wish to please Thee. I would be glad to know if Thou art pleased with me".

Rabia's master gave her a great deal of hard work, and yet, Rabia fasted all day and spent a great part of the nights in prayer and meditation.

One night Rabia's master heard some sounds and woke up. He looked down from his window. He saw Rabia in the courtyard. She was bowing in worship and her master heard her say. "O my adorable Lord! Thou knowest already my heart. My eyes are ever turned towards Thee. I wish to worship Thee always. Thou hast made me a slave. What can I do now? How can I serve Thee constantly? As I am a slave, I can worship Thee only at night".

The master saw a light above Rabia's head which illumined the whole house. He was struck with wonder. He thought that Rabia was a pious lady. The next morning he released her and begged her pardon. Thereupon she left the city and lived in a hut in the desert. After sometime she came to Basra and lived there till her death at the age of ninety years.

Rabia liked solitude very much. She led a very simple life. She embraced poverty all through. She had rich disciples, but she lived in a dilapidated hut. She had one or two earthen plates, a broken jar and one or two small pieces of cloth. She frequently fasted and spent her days and nights in prayer and meditation. Men and women went to her cottage to get her blessings and receive spiritual instructions. Rabia received many offers of marriage. She said, "I am devoted to God. I have no desire for human relations. I am concerned with God. How should I need a husband with whom to be occupied? It does not please me to be distracted from Him even for a single moment".

Miracles

Rabia laid great stress on the love of God and worship for His sake alone, without any hope of reward or fear of punishment. To her, God was the Beloved. She taught that the lover must abandon everything including his will and be totally resigned to the Divine Will. He must renounce all desires, even the desire for emancipation.

When Rabia was nearing Mecca, the Kaaba left its place and came to welcome her. Rabia said, "It is the Lord of the house that I desire. What have I to do with the house?".

While Rabia was on a pilgrimage, her camel died. She was left behind by the caravan, but the camel came to life again miraculously.

One night there was no light in the house. Some Sufis came to Rabia. Rabia blew on her finger which gave a light all night. When she walked on the hills, animals and birds collected around her.

Anecdotes

At a gathering of Sufis, Hassan said, "He is not sincere in his claim, who is not patient under chastisement of his Lord". Rabia said, "I smell egoism in his words". Shaquq said, "He is not sincere who is not thankful for the chastisement of his Lord". Rabia saw that something better than that was needed. Then Malih Dinar said, "He is not sincere who does not delight in the chastisement of his Lord". Rabia said, "Even this is not good enough". They then asked her to speak. She said, "He is not sincere who does not forget the chastisement of his Lord".

Rabia saw a man with a bandage round his head. On enquiry he told her that he had a headache. She asked him how old he was. He said that he was thirty years old. She asked him, "Were you in pain and trouble for the greater part of life?". He replied, "No, this is the first time I have a headache". She said, "For thirty years the Lord kept your body fit and you never bound upon it the bandage of gratitude, but for one night of pain in your head you bound it with a bandage of complaint".

One day Rabia gave a man some money to buy a cloth. The man went away and returned. He asked her, "O lady! What colour shall I buy?". Rabia said, "As it is a question of colour, give me the money back. Colour relates to the senses". She took the money and threw it in the river Tigris.

One day people saw Rabia running away with fire in one hand and a bucket of water in the other. They asked, "O lady, where are you going?". Rabia said, "I am going to set fire to paradise and put out the fire of hell, so that both veils may disappear for the pilgrims, and their purpose may be sure, and the servant of God may see Him for Himself alone without hope of paradise and fear of hell".

Rabia was asked why she worshipped God. She replied, "Is it not enough for me that I am given hands to worship Him? He is worthy of worship without any other motive". On another occasion Rabia said, "I have not served God for fear of hell, for if I have, I would be a wretched hireling; nor from love of paradise, for then I would be a disloyal servant; nor have I served Him for the sake of reward. But I have served Him only for the love of Him".

A rich man offered to give Rabia money. She said, "Verily I should be ashamed to ask for worldly things even from the Lord to whom the world belongs. How can I ask from those to whom it does not belong?".

Another built a house for Rabia and requested her to live in it. She went there and admired the decoration, but at once returned saying, "I am afraid I shall become attached to the house and would no longer be able to occupy myself with my wish. My only desire is to dedicate myself to the service of the Lord".

During her illness, Rabia never complained. Once someone asked her to pray for mercy. She asked him, "Is it not God who wills this suffering?". He replied, "Yes". She said, "Then why do you bid me to ask for what is contrary to His Will? It is not good to oppose our Beloved".

Someone asked Rabia, "When is the servant truly resigned to God?". She said, "When his pleasure in misfortune equals his pleasure in prosperity".

Some Sufis said, "The door is opened to him who knocks". Rabia said, "How long will you knock? Who will open? Who closed it?".

Someone asked Rabia, "What do you desire?". She said, "I am a servant. What has a servant to do with desire? If I will a thing and my Lord does not will it, it would be want of belief. That should be willed which He wills so that you may be His true servant".

Sayings of Rabia

Despise the world, because it is the most pleasurable thing for you when you look down upon it.

* * *

The servant should possess nothing in the world save the Lord, if he wishes nearness to the Lord.

* * *

Hide your good deeds as you hide your bad actions.

AVADAYAKKAL

The general belief among the devotees of the Lord is that Lord Siva Himself incarnated in this world as Sri Jagadguru Adi Sankaracharya of Kaladi; and that Mother Parvati incarnated Herself as Sri Avadayakkal of Shenkottai, apparently to prove that women, too, could attain Self-realisation even in this Kali Yuga.

Avadayakkal was born of a pious Saiva Vadama couple of Shenkottai in South India. Even as a child she showed signs of a high mental state. She would do nothing voluntarily. For everything she had to be prompted. She would eat what was given; she would put on whatever dress was given. She would go where she was asked to go; and do whatever she was told to do. She was married to a Brahmin boy even when she was a girl.

When Avadai came of age, the parents fixed a date for her nuptials. Avadai was dressed nicely for the occasion and led into the bridal chamber by her relatives, who shut the door and came away. Her husband was sitting on the bed and watching her. She would not move from the spot where she was left by her relatives. The boy picked up a garland of flowers that was lying on the bed and smelt it. There was a venomous cobra in the garland and it bit him at once to unconsciousness. Before long, the husband was dead.

The next morning, in accordance with the prevailing custom, the ladies of the house came to the bridal chamber and opened the door. To their astonishment, the girl Avadai stood there rooted to the same spot where she had been left. They asked her why she merely stood there. She replied: "Why! You had asked me to stand here!". They looked at the husband; they grew suspicious. When they went near the bed, they found the husband dead. They attributed this to the girl's evil stars and took the girl and the husband's corpse out of the room.

The obsequies were duly performed and the girl's head was shaven, ornaments removed and white cloth given. But Avadai did not have any feelings at all about the loss of the young husband. The world declared her a widow, an embodiment of inauspiciousness; forbidding her to come out of her room or to attend any festivities. Avadai would get up very early in the morning and go to the river for bath; for, she had to return to the house before the other people were up!

One morning Avadai went to the river to take her bath. Before bathing, she picked up a mango leaf from the bed of the river to clean her teeth. The moment she applied that mango leaf to the teeth, she had a strange transcendental experience.

It so happened that just that morning the sage Ayyaval (a Gurubhai of the world-renowned sage Sadasiva Brahman) was there, meditating underneath a Peepui tree. He had cleansed his teeth on the banks of the same river and thrown away the mango leaf used by him on the bed of the river. Avadai had used that leaf; and the moment the sage's Ucchishta or sacred remnant was swallowed by her, the little dirt that covered the Atma Jyoti in her was washed away. She at once realised the Atman within. Instinctively she walked to the feet of the sage under the Peepul tree.

Avadai prostrated to Ayyaval. Placing his hand (Hasthadiksha) on her head, the sage pronounced: *"Brahma Satyam"*. Avadai's heart was illumined. She entered into Samadhi or that indescribable superconscious state. A little while later Ayyaval gave her a Linga for worship and went away.

That very moment Sarasvati had taken her abode on Avadai's tongue; and Avadai's transcendental experience flowed through her tongue in the shape of divine, inspiring songs. She astounded one and all in the town by her extraordinary wisdom. Whatever she said, whatever she sang, portrayed her inner illumination. People however considered that Avadai had gone mad and merely confined her to her room!

In the meantime, Avadai's parents died. This gave Avadai a great independence of movement. She at once opened the door of her room and went out into the wide world—her own home! She went alone from place to place—a young woman, singing wisdom, radiating wisdom, transmitting wisdom to one and all that came near her.

Avadai reached Tiruvananthapuram. As usual she had her bath in a tank and wanted to do Linga Puja. The king, who had heard of her and of her regular worship of the Linga with Bael leaves, had sent her a basketful of golden Bael leaves for her worship. Avadai bathed in the tank and set about on the bank to perform the worship with the golden Bael leaves. As soon as the Puja was over, Avadai collected the Bael leaves and threw them into the tank as Nirmalya (offered flowers), as is the custom. The king was astonished to hear this. He understood the great renunciation of Avadai and her Para Vairagya. To Avadai, gold and leaf were the same.

From Tiruvananthapuram Avadai went to a conference of the heads of religious sects. She thrilled the audience with her supreme wisdom and established the unity of all sects. They spoke derisively of her at first, referring to her shaven head and calling her, "You Mottai!". Avadai quickly retorted: "Who is Mottai? Is it my body? Is it my mind? Is it my Prana? Is it my Jiva? Or, is it my Atma? Who am I? How can 'I' be Mottai?". In the end they all eulogised her greatly for her divine wisdom and prostrated to her.

On another occasion, the king of a State called Avadai to his Durbar and offered to marry her. "You, so young and beautiful, should not wander about like this. Become my wife and remain in the palace as my queen with all powers." Avadai feigned to agree to this proposal provided the king answered some questions she would put him. And the questions were so grand and sublime that the king felt ashamed of himself and got initiated into Jnana by her!

Avadai again met her Gurudev, Sri Ayyaval, and joined his group of disciples. She was the only woman member of the group. The other disciples of the sage greatly ill-treated her. She was treated more as a dog to be looked after with the remnants of the Ashram food than as an inmate. Sri Ayyaval wanted to teach them all a lesson.

One day, all the disciples of Sri Ayyaval rowed to a sand-mound in the middle of the river Cauvery. They all meditated there. Ayyaval was on the banks of the river. Suddenly the disciples felt the water-level rising. They quickly perceived the danger and wanted to return. Avadai, however, was deep in Samadhi. They wanted to test her and so left her there and came away. Water was rising at great speed. Soon it looked as though Avadai would be drowned. She had got up from Samadhi and found that the others had gone away. She looked towards her Gurudev. He merely held up his arm to signal to her: "Stand there itself!". Avadai obeyed!! And what a great miracle! Avadai stood there three days and the rising flood left just that much of the sand-mound where her feet rested! She returned when the flood went down after three days.

By this and other similar incidents, every one in the Ashram realised the greatness of this lady-saint. Later, Sri Ayyaval too made no secret of her glory. People began to flock to her for her blessings. She sang and sang; and through her songs runs the current of the divine wisdom of the Upanishads.

Sufi Saints

JALAL-UD-DIN RUMI

Jalal-ud-din Rumi was a Persian sage, saint and poet of great reputation. He was born at Balkh on 30th September, 1207 A.D. His father, Bahauddin Valad, was a pious and cultured man. He was a famous professor, the principal of a college.

The family left Balkh and finally settled at Qoriya.

Jalal was a child prodigy with superhuman powers. The existence of child prodigies gives the clue to the truth that there is reincarnation. Man gains only a little experience and knowledge in one span of life. He will have to take several births before he becomes a genius or child prodigy through accumulation of vast experiences through various incarnations.

Even when Jalal was a boy of six, he had wonderful visions and spiritual experiences and he exhibited marvellous Siddhis. After his father died, Jalal became a professor. As he was an extraordinary genius, students from various places came to study under him.

Later on, Jalal married. He met his master Shams Tabriez, the celebrated Sufi sage, at Qoriya. Shams Tabriez liked Jalal immensely. He gave Jalal spiritual instructions in Sufism.

Sufism is akin to Vedanta. The Sufi sage has a large heart. He embraces the whole humanity. He sees the Lord in all names and forms. He has cosmic vision. He unites with all. His mercy is unbounded. His love is illimitable. He is an embodiment of love.

Jalal was extremely tolerant in religious matters. He had universal love and equal vision. He had Christian disciples also.

Jalal's two celebrated works are: *Diwani Shamsi Tabriez* and *Masnavi-i-Ma'navi.* They are very inspiring, heart-melting and soul-stirring. Divine love breathes in every line of Jalal's writings. There are clear instructions on how to develop divine love and how to attain union with the Lord.

Jalal-ud-din Rumi won the title of Maulana. He was respected by the rich and the poor, the aristocrats and the common people. His poems are recited by countless people. Even European scholars have great admiration for Jalal. They regard him as the wisest of the Persian Sufis and the greatest of mystical poets. They consider him as an inspired sage of the highest realisation.

The following are some of Jalal's essential teachings:

"Be pious. Eat little. Sleep little. Speak little. Be virtuous. Destroy evil qualities. Annihilate lust. Bear patiently insults and injuries done by others. Shun the company of wicked men. Keep company with wise sages. Do good to people. Shun Siddhis as they are hindrances in the spiritual path."

Jalal-ud-din Rumi passed away at Qoriya in 1273 A.D.

MANSOOR

Mansoor is known as the "Saint of Baghdad". He lived four hundred years ago during the time of Haroon-al-Rashid, the Caliph of Baghdad. He was a poor, but pious and virtuous Muslim Fakir. He practised constant meditation and saw God in all names and forms. He had the cosmic vision of the Over-soul. The divine light descended on him. He realised the Self. He identified himself with the Self. He proclaimed to the world the doctrine, "*Anal Hauq*". It means, "I am God". The God-intoxicated Mansoor uttered *Anal Hauq* wherever he went. *Anal Hauq* corresponds to *Soham*, *Sivoham* or *Aham Brahma Asmi* of the Vedantins. The Muslims took Mansoor for an infidel or Kaffir. They took him for a hypocrite.

As Mansoor was a good man, the Maulvis or priests pitied him and tried their best to convince him that he was wrong in uttering *Anal Hauq*. But Mansoor stood firm in his convictions. Then the Maulvis ordered that Mansoor should be publicly hanged to death. His hands and feet were tied to the post. He was about to be beheaded. He was then asked to change his faith and give up uttering *Anal Hauq*. He was told to choose between his belief and his life. Even then Mansoor remained adamant. He did not move an inch. The spectators were struck with wonder.

Mansoor's legs were cut off first. But Mansoor smiled and uttered *Anal Hauq*. Then his eyeballs were pulled out. Still Mansoor uttered *Anal Hauq* with a smile. His hands were to be cut off next. The onlookers pitied Mansoor. They requested the Maulvis that Mansoor should be spared. Millions of people uttered *Anal Hauq*. Mansoor had the greatest satisfaction now. Despite the request of the people, Mansoor was beheaded. The blood that gushed from his trunk cried *Anal Hauq*. The body was burnt and the ashes cried out *Anal Hauq*.

The Maulvis repented for their action, for they were now convinced that they had butchered a saint. But it was too late.

The Maulvis realised that Mansoor's spirit lived even after his body was burnt to ashes. They were astonished when the blood and ashes cried out *Anal Hauq*. Mansoor paid dearly for establishing his doctrine of *Anal Hauq*. He has immortalized his name and *Anal Hauq* by paying a dear price for his convictions. Mansoor passed away four hundred years ago, but his *Anal Hauq* still remains in the world. There is not a single Muslim who is not acquainted with the life of this great saint who stuck to his convictions even when his hands were cut off and his eyes were pulled out.

Noble Mansoor still lives in the hearts of all. It is not possible to find in the annals of the history of saints an equal to Mansoor who paid the greatest price for his convictions.

Glory to Mansoor!

SHAMS TABRIEZ

Shams Tabriez was another Brahma Jnani of Multan. Multan is the birthplace of Prahlad. The famous Mansoor lived there. Multan is famous for "G.G.G.G."—*Gharmi* (heat), *Gharda* (dust), *Gadha* (fakirs) and *Gorasthan* (tombs).

Shams Tabriez lived some four hundred years ago. He was a Hindu Sannyasin. He had 'Puri' for his Sannyasin name. The Mohammedans gave him the name of Shams Tabriez just to appropriate him to their side. Shams Tabriez was disliked by the then Badshah, as he went on repeating, "*Anal Hauq, Anal Hauq*".

One day Shams Tabriez was very hungry. Someone gave him a piece of raw flesh. Shams Tabriez asked some of the neighbours to give him some fire to roast the piece of flesh. They all refused, because they feared that they would be punished by the Badshah if they did so. Shams Tabriez kept the flesh in his hands, showed it to the sun and ordered: "O sun, come down immediately and roast this piece of flesh for me. I am very hungry". At once the sun came down and roasted the piece of flesh. Shams Tabriez ate it with joy. The scorching rays of the sun began to burn the people of Multan and the Badshah. The Badshah, out of fear, prostrated before Shams Tabriez and said, "Forgive me, my lord! Make the sun go back to its original place; or else we all will die now". Then Shams Tabriez ordered the sun: "Go back to your original place, O sun!". The sun obeyed his orders implicitly.

A Jnani is God Himself. He can do anything through Satsankalpa. He is the King of kings, though he has no treasury. What is a petty Badshah before a Sannyasin, the Emperor of emperors?

Shams Tabriez was skinned out by order of the Badshah, but the sage simply laughed.

BULLA SHAH

Bulla Shah was a Sufi saint. He was a celebrated saint of Punjab. He was the disciple of the Sufi saint Mian Mir.

Sufism in its philosophy comes nearest to Vedanta. There is the relationship of "Lover and the Beloved". A Sufi is free from fanaticism. He is calm, serene and tranquil like a Vedantin. He is a sage. He is full of love, kindness and mercy.

Bulla Shah was a Badshah of the town of Bulkh near Bukhara. He was a married man. He had abundant wealth and property. But he did not lead the life of sensual indulgence. Worldly riches and possessions did not attract him. He had no charm for mundane things. He was full of dispassion and discrimination. He led a simple life. His thoughts were sublime and lofty. He yearned for the vision of God. He longed for absolute freedom, perfection and perennial joy.

The clarion call had come to Bulla Shah. The fire of spirituality was kindled in his heart. He found the hollowness of mundane life. He realised fully that everything here was transitory and fleeting. He longed for Satsang and the company of saints and sages. The fire of renunciation was ignited.

Bulla Shah heard of the glory and greatness of saint Mian Mir. He at once installed his young son as the Badshah of Bulkh. He marched towards the cottage of the saint, which was three miles off to the east of Lahore, with his hundred attendants and one minister. When he entered the abode of the saint, his love for the Lord increased. His heart was filled with devotion and love. He longed to have Darshan of the saint. He implored for an interview with the saint. It was refused.

Bulla Shah resolved to surrender himself to the lotus feet of the saint. He asked his attendants and minister to return to Bulkh. He distributed away all the wealth he had brought. He wrapped himself in a blanket in the biting winter and became a Sufist Fakir.

Bulla Shah of regal splendour embraced poverty. He became a penniless pauper. He now beseeched for the saint's Darshan. Mian Mir sent word that the time had not come and asked Bulla Shah to go to a Fakir who resided on the banks of the river Ravi and discipline himself rigorously for a period of twelve years and then come to him.

Bulla Shah implicitly obeyed. He proceeded to the banks of the Ravi and found the Fakir. He took Sattvic food and practised Yoga strenuously for twelve years.

Bulla Shah purified his mind and removed all evil traits. He filled his heart with divine virtues. He now had a one-pointed, sharp, subtle mind to grasp the Truth. The Fakir said, "Bulla Shah! You are ripe now. Proceed to meet Mian Mir. He will gladly give you Darshan and give you further spiritual instructions. Be quick. Tarry not".

Bulla Shah proceeded at once to the abode of saint Mian Mir. The saint received Bulla Shah with affection and love and initiated him into the mysteries of Truth and blessed him. He found in Bulla Shah a fit instrument to carry out his mission for the welfare and supreme good of mankind.

Once the Maulvis asked Bulla Shah who he was. Bulla Shah replied, "*Anal Hauq*. I am He". This enraged the Maulvis. The Maulvis arrested Bulla Shah and took him at once to the Nawab for punishment. The Nawab found out that Bulla Shah was a saint and released him.

At another time Bulla Shah declared himself as the Emperor. The Maulvis became very indignant. They took him to the Nawab. Bulla Shah made the Nawab understand that his empire was that of the Self which was infinite, boundariless and eternal. The Nawab was fully convinced of the spiritual greatness and splendour of the saint. He declared that no one should interfere and disturb the great saint and if anyone violated his order, he would be punished severely.

Bulla Shah's verses contain the fundamentals of Advaita Vedanta.

Christian Mystics

SAINT AUGUSTINE

Lord Krishna says in His Gita: "Even if the most sinful worships Me with undivided heart, he too must be accounted righteous, for he hath rightly resolved. Speedily he becometh dutiful and goeth to eternal peace. O Kaunteya! Know thou for certain that My devotee perisheth never". (Ch. IX, 30-31)

This is true in the case of St. Augustine. He repented for all his sins and made a strong resolve to lead a virtuous life and actually led the divine life. He too became a great reputed saint.

Aurelius Augustinus was a Roman African. He was born on the 13th November, 354 A.D. at Thagaste, a small town in the vicinity of Carthage, the capital of the Roman provinces in Africa. He was born of Patricius, a poor man, and yet, he won great distinction at the University of Carthage. He lost his father in his early manhood.

Augustine became a teacher of oratory and earned great reputation and wealth. He left Africa in 383 A.D. and became a Professor of Rhetoric in the University of Milan. Here he became acquainted with Bishop Ambrose.

In his youth Augustine led a licentious life. He was a lover of praise. Worldly things were dear to him. Later on, he renounced ambition and unchastity and surrendered himself at the feet of Jesus Christ. He was baptized by Ambrose on Easter Day in 387 A.D. After baptism, Augustine returned to Africa and distributed all his money to the poor. He founded an Ashram and spent his time in prayer, meditation and study. He became a great Bhakta or devotee.

Augustine became a priest. Then he became a bishop in 395 A.D. He remained until his death in the small city Hippo in Africa. In 430 A.D. Hippo was besieged by barbarian vandals. Augustine was in the city. He declined to escape and leave his people. He fell ill in the third month of the siege. He asked his friends to write in bold letters on the wall of his bed-room the seven Penitential Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143) so that he might read them from his bed. He died shortly before the city was captured.

Augustine was loved by many people. He was always encircled by his friends. He was not a saintly child. He was very fond of play. He prayed earnestly to the Lord that he might not be beaten at school. His prayer was not granted. So he doubted the value of prayer. Monica, his saintly mother, tried to instil in his heart reverence for God and love for the name of Christ. But Augustine gave little attention to spiritual matters. He had a very brilliant university career. Augustine was a law-abiding man throughout his life. He had quick understanding, an acute power of discerning and a searching analytical intellect.

Augustine accused himself chiefly of two temptations of sexual sin. At the age of eighteen, he had a son. He had connection with the mother of Adeodatus. But this period of indulgence was very short. His heart was changed. He now yearned for Truth. He resigned his professorship. He wrote philosophical books. He renounced every ambition. The writings of St. Paul gave him delight. Augustine liked solitude and founded a small Ashram near Thagaste, which was the model for the Augustinian system of monastic life. The inmates had no vows.

Augustine was simple in all his ways. He was abstemious in his diet. He felt that wealth was a great hindrance to God-realisation. Hence he gave up all of his own property and practised simplicity and self-denial.

Augustine wrote commentaries on several parts of the Bible. *The Trinity* and *The City of God* are his great works of constructive theology. Augustine wrote his *Confessions* a year or two after he was made the Bishop of Hippo. This is his autobiography. This is a thrilling book. It took thirty years to write the book *The Trinity*. It is one of the masterpieces of Christian doctrine. The greatest book of St. Augustine is the *Civitas Dei* which gives a glimpse of the peace and joy of Augustine's inner spiritual life. Augustine wrote the book *The City of God* in thirteen years. Augustine's books, his letters and his sermons carried his potent and sublime thoughts over the whole Roman Empire. In fact, they have profoundly influenced Christianity to this day.

Augustine embraced Christianity when he was thirty-two years old. His conversion was a new birth to him. It completely changed his whole scheme of life and shifted the centre of his personality. His book *Confessions* was written ten years after his baptism. His prayers, which are the outpourings of his heart, are addressed to the Lord Himself. It is a long cry of repentance with a contrite sincere heart, wonder, awe, reverence, gratitude, joy and love.

Mark how Augustine confesses his sins. "I cannot but awake in the love of Thy mercy and to the sweetness of Thy grace, whereby whoso is weak becomes strong. My good deeds are Thy appointment and Thy judgment. I confess my sins not before Thee alone in a secret exultation with trembling and a secret sorrow with hope, but in the ears also of the believing sons of men, sharers of my joy and partners in my mortality, my fellow-citizens and my fellow-pilgrims, who are gone before or are to follow on, companions of my way."

Augustine begins: "Great art Thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Thy power and Thy wisdom infinite".

And Augustine ends: "When all is done, I hope that I shall rest in Thy great Holiness, but Thou, O Good, that needeth no good things, Thou art ever at peace. From Thee let us ask, Thee let us seek, at Thy door let us knock. Thus, we shall there be receiving, finding and opening. Amen".

Augustine condemns himself: "What did it profit me, O Lord, that all the books I could procure of the so-called liberal arts, I, the vile slave of vile affections, read by myself and understood? I had my back to the Light and I wandered from Thee into a far country to spend my energy and wealth upon harlots. What profited my good abilities, not employed to good uses?".

Such a state dawns in a man when he gets true and lasting dispassion and discrimination.

Here are some of the inner spiritual experiences of St. Augustine which bespeak his attainment of Godhead and sublime God-vision. He says:

"O Lord! Thou hast made us for Thyself and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee.

"Narrow is the mansion of my soul. O Lord, cleanse me from my secret faults. Thou wast at the helm, but very secretly. Thy faithful mercy hovered over me, afar I wandered with a stiff neck, loving my own ways and not Thine, withdrawing further from Thee. Thou didst guide me. Thou didst not forsake me. Thou didst deal with me by wondrous ways. O Lord, little by little, with most tender and merciful hand, touching and composing my heart, didst thou persuade me.

"I enjoy the unspeakable sweetness of the vision of God. It is good for me to be very near to God. I enjoy the blessedness of the holy city which is above the holy angels.

"God is light. God is bliss. God loves goodness. In the eternity of God is real life. In the truth of God is eternal light. In the goodness of God is perennial joy. The soul itself becomes a sacrifice when it offers itself to God, that it may be enkindled by the fire of His love and may receive His beauty and become pleasing to Him, losing the state of mundane desire and being refashioned in the image of lasting loveliness".

Glory to St. Augustine who stands before us even now as an example of Lord Krishna's teachings in the Gita—"Even if thou art the most sinful of all sinners, yet shall thou cross over all sins by the raft of wisdom. Even if the most sinful worships Me with undivided heart, he attains eternal peace". St. Augustine instils hope into the hearts of the despondent and goads them to march fearlessly in the precipitous path of spirituality.

There is no wonder if a man who is born with good spiritual Samskaras attains God-realisation. But there is great wonder if a vicious man like Augustine, Arunagiri, Ratnakar, Jagai, Madai or Vemana attains Godhead. Very keen is the struggle in the path in the case of the latter people.

SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Saint Francis is called the little poor man of Assisi. He was born in the year 1182 in the town of Assisi in Italy. His father's name was Bernadone. Bernadone was a very wealthy merchant of Assisi. Francis was a very good-looking boy. He was merry and soft-hearted. So he had many friends. All the noble men's sons were his companions.

Francis was brought up in luxury and gaiety. He spent a considerable portion of his wealth in extravagant pleasures. He used to drink with the young princes of the land.

One day Francis was joking and laughing with his friends. A beggar came along crying for alms. Francis, who was soft-hearted, gave whatever he had in his pocket to the beggar. His companions mocked at him for his charitable act. Dispassion dawned in his heart. The sight of the beggar set him thinking about the poverty and misery of this mundane life. He gave much money to the poor. His father thought that Francis was wasting his money and rebuked him.

Some time after this, Francis was laid up in bed for many months on account of some serious disease. He was about to die. But the Lord saved him as he had to carry out a definite mission in his life. The nature of Francis was entirely changed. Francis prayed to the Lord for light and guidance as to his future. He had a vision of Lord Jesus. He made a strong determination to renounce his old way of living to tread a life of purity and to dedicate his life to the service of humanity.

As soon as Francis got well, he informed his parents of his determination. They were disappointed. They became angry with Francis. Francis gave up his old ways and habits and set up to serve God. He distributed clothes, goods and money to the poor. His father was very much annoyed towards his son. He said, "Is this the gratitude you show to me? I laboured hard and amassed wealth. You are lavishly wasting it on these miserable unworthy wretches".

Francis' friends mocked at him and teased him. His father turned him out of the house. Francis lived like a beggar. His old friends even pelted him with stones and mud. He bore everything with patience. He wore a coarse dress and ate simple food.

Francis lived in a cave in the mountains of Assisi and spent his time in prayer and meditation for two years. Some kind people gave him food, but very often he had to starve.

Francis called the body '*brother ass*'. He kept this *brother ass* under perfect discipline and control. Sometimes he kept this *brother ass* without food and water and denied it some special food that it liked very much.

Francis was humble. He loved God's creatures. He loved birds and beasts. He loved the depressed and the outcastes. He treated the birds, the beasts and all beings as brothers and sisters.

Francis went from village to village preaching the love of God. He invited people to join him in his life of service if they were willing. Bernard, a rich man of Assisi, was very much attracted by the saintliness of Francis. He joined Francis. He was the first follower of Francis. He placed all his wealth at the altar of God. Eleven others also joined Francis. They distributed all their wealth to the poor. Francis and his followers went all over Italy preaching, teaching, healing and blessing wherever they went.

The gospel of kindness and love of Francis soon spread all over Europe and earned for him the name of St. Francis. People called him the little poor man of Assisi. He lived for ever in the hearts of all men.

St. Francis collected many followers and founded the Order of Mendicant Friars or the Franciscans. The members of this Order have to take a vow of poverty and love.

St. Francis gave up his mortal coil in 1228.

The followers of St. Francis built a beautiful church round him on the hill of Assisi, the hill he so dearly loved. The influence of St. Francis and the sweet aroma of the life he lived will last for ever.

Glory to St. Francis, the little poor man of Assisi, but an illustrious saint!

SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER

Saint Xavier was born in the small kingdom of Navarne in Spain in 1506. He lost his father when he was nine years old. His two elder brothers were soldiers. Francis did not like the life of a soldier. He wanted to become a professor. He had a desire to join the University of Paris.

Xavier joined the University of Paris in 1525. He remained there for eleven years. He was an athlete. He had a good countenance. He was handsome. He took his Arts degree in 1530. He longed for place and power in the church.

Xavier was a linguist. He talked five languages—Latin, Spanish, French, Portuguese and Basque. He was an erudite philosopher and a great theologist. He was fastidious and sensitive. He was sincere and unselfish. He was humble and plain without any show.

Ignatius Loyola came to the University. He was a cripple. He was a soldier. His leg was smashed by a cannon ball. He was now a Knight of the Church of Christ. He had a conversation with Francis Xavier. He used to say very often, "Master Francis! What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?". Xavier liked the company and talks of Ignatius, but he did not wish to abandon the ambitions of worldly life. He was a young and able professor. A large number of people went to hear his lectures on Aristotle. His future was very bright. Fame and honour were before him. But the words of Ignatius, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?", were ringing in his ears.

Francis Xavier seriously contemplated on the profound import of the words of Ignatius. He abandoned all ambition, worldly position and income. The professorship in the University of Paris had no longer any attraction for him. He embraced poverty and chastity and made a firm resolve to live for Christ and Christ alone. Discrimination and dispassion dawned in him. Worldly objects lost all charm for him. His mind was definitely turned towards God. Ignatius became his guide and spiritual teacher. Xavier spent much of his time in prayer and meditation. He went to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage.

Xavier distributed all that he had to the poor. He clothed himself in coarse garments. He took a staff in his hand and put a leather mantle on his shoulder. He set on foot to Venice. He underwent a lot of hardship on the way. He endured the showers of France and the winter cold of Germany. He passed through the Alpine snow.

The secretary to an ambassador was Xavier's companion when Xavier was moving through the Alpine snow. He fell from his horse and was swallowed up in a huge mass of snow. It was upon a slippery and precipitous rock. Down below, there was a swift torrent. The friends of the secretary did not venture to save his life. But Xavier regarded the life of the secretary as his own. He went to the spot and drew him up from the snow. He risked his own life. What a large, sympathetic heart Xavier had!

Xavier arrived in Venice in 1537. He was exhausted with the cold and hardship of the journey. He started his service in Venice. He tended the sick in the hospital and served many incurable sick persons. He nursed the sick and prayed with them. He talked to the people about the love of Christ. He went to the prison, served the prisoners and prayed with them. He proceeded to Rome on foot. There was continuous rain. The country was so flooded that he had to walk at times in water up to the waist. But Xavier was ever joyful. He visited the villages and preached the gospel of Christ. He did not ask anything from the people. He declined to accept presents when they were offered by the people. This created a very good impression on the minds of the people. They thought that Xavier was perfectly selfless and was working for the benefit and emancipation of others disinterestedly and with a magnanimous heart.

Xavier fell ill and underwent a lot of difficulties during his period of sickness. He became pale and thin and was disfigured by his long privations and illness. He was more like a corpse. He was thirty-two now.

In 1541 Xavier set sail from Lisbon for India with three or four old garments and two books. Though he was clad in rags, he had the bearing of a prince or a great divine personality.

King John of Portugal arranged a first-class ticket for Xavier. But Xavier became the ship's doctor, steward, nurse, evangelist, tutor and cook. He did the humblest services possible to the passengers. He gave up his cabin to a sick person and himself slept on a coil of rope. He washed the clothes of the poor and the sick passengers. He was supposed to dine at the table of the Governor, but he ate with the common people. His food was sent to him from the high table, but he distributed it to the sick. He washed the bodies of sick persons and their clothes and fed them with his own hands. He cheered up those who were very sick and gave them words of encouragement and hope of recovery.

In 1542 Xavier landed in India and reached Goa. He was thirty-six years old then. He had a weak physical body on account of continual hardships and frequent fever during the voyage. But he had unabated zeal and enthusiasm and eagerness for service to humanity and unbounded love.

Xavier lived in the hospital near the harbour. He slept at night on the floor at the foot of the beds of those who were dangerously ill, so that he might reach them at once, when called.

This is real service. This is a real flower that can be consecrated at the altar of God. Young aspirants should imbibe the wonderful spirit of service of Xavier and follow in his footsteps in the path of Karma Yoga. Such service only can purify and soften the heart and prepare it for the reception of divine light and grace.

Xavier moved from village to village and begged for the lepers, the starving and the prisoners. He raised a large sum of money and did permanent good to the helpless.

The old garment of Xavier was worn out. He was provided with a robe of silk, but he declined to wear it.

Xavier went to the jail to teach and minister to the prisoners. He visited schools and taught the prayers, creed and commandments to the boys.

On one occasion Xavier used an umbrella. That was his greatest luxury. He went barefoot with a poor torn gown. Everyone loved him so much. Xavier caused forty-five churches to be built along the coast. Sometimes he would climb up a tree and from there he would address a big audience of six thousand people in their own language. He made a large number of converts.

Xavier endured great hardships. He travelled on foot continuously backwards and forwards over a large district across burning sands in summer. He moved when there was rain. His food was scanty and monotonous. He took a little rice and pulse. He drank no wine. He took only one meal a day. He slept two or three hours at night.

Xavier went to Malacca and Ceylon. Then he proceeded to Japan in 1549. Though he went with high hopes, his work was spoiled by the cruelty of the Portuguese. Yajiro, a Japanese, was his first convert. The number of Japanese converts was small.

Xavier came back to India. He wanted to take the gospel into China, but he found it difficult to get entry into the ship. He fell ill and had no food or shelter. He passed away quietly repeating some psalms on the day of the Festival of St. John, the Evangelist. He lived for forty-five years only on this earth.

The Sikh Gurus

GURU NANAK

Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh religion, was born in 1469 A.D. in the village of Talwandi, on the bank of the Ravi in Punjab. He was called the "Prophet of the Punjab and Sind". He was born of Mehta Kalu and Tripta. From his very childhood he had a contemplative mind and a pious nature. He used to spend his time in meditation and spiritual practices.

Guru Nanak's father tried his level best to turn Nanak's mind towards the worldly objects. He tried to engage him in looking after the cultivation of the land. But Nanak was not interested in this. He spent his time in meditation even in the fields. When he was asked the reason for his idleness, he replied, "I am not idle; I am guarding my own field. My body is a field. The mind is the ploughman. Righteousness is cultivation. Modesty is the water for its irrigation. I have sown my field with the seed of the sacred Name of the Lord". Nanak's father was very much disappointed, but again, through various ways, he tried to turn Nanak's mind towards the worldly objects. But again he failed.

Nanak was married to Sulakhani, daughter of Mula, a resident of Batala in Gurdaspur district. Nanak had two children. But these ties did not in any way bind him or stop his spiritual pursuits. Nanak was appointed as the in-charge of the storehouse of the Nawab of Sultanpur. There he discharged his duties very well. He spent a small portion for his own maintenance and distributed the rest in charity.

Nanak gave up his service and distributed all his wealth to the poor and became a Fakir. He lived in solitude and practised severe austerities and intense meditation. He sang inspired songs. They are all collected and preserved in the *Adi Granth*—the sacred book of the Sikhs.

Nanak became a public preacher at the age of thirty-four. His first disciple was Mardana. Nanak's preaching produced a deep impression on the mind of the public. Nanak led a

Parivrajaka life for some time. He had great influence over Babar, who had a very great regard for Nanak. Nanak went to Mecca, Medina, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Turkey, Arabia, Baghdad, Kabul, Kandahar and Siam, preaching his gospel all through. He exhorted all people to live righteously and with brotherly love and hospitality. He preached and taught: "Do *Nama Smaran.* Love God. Be devoted to the one God. Serve your fellow beings. God is all-in-all. Pray. Praise Him always. Attain the bliss of union with Him". Nanak tried his level best to unite the Hindus and the Muslims.

Nanak performed many miracles in Mecca, Hassan Abdal and other places. He was a reformer. He carried the message of peace and love for everybody. He was very catholic in his views. He had no distinction of caste, creed or sex.

The beautiful compositions of mystic poems uttered by Nanak are contained in *Japji.* They constitute the morning prayers of the Sikhs. *The Sohila* contains the evening prayers. Therein Nanak has clearly indicated the various ways to realise God. He has also thrown much light on the various intricate problems of life.

Vahe Guru is the Guru Mantra for the followers of Guru Nanak. The holy book of the Sikhs is the *Granth Sahib.* It contains the hymns of the first five Gurus and also a few selections from the hymns of different contemporary saints such as Kabir. Later on, the hymns of the ninth Guru were incorporated in the *Granth Sahib* by the tenth Guru—Guru Govind Singh. The compositions of Guru Nanak are very extensive.

Nanak settled at Khartarpur towards the end of his life. He died in the year 1538 A.D. at the age of sixty-nine. Guru Angad succeeded Guru Nanak.*

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* For a more detailed account of the life of Guru Nanak, please see page 63 under the section "The Prophets".

GURU ANGAD

Guru Angad (Lahina) was born in 1504 A.D. at Sarai Matta, now called Sarai Naga, close to Mukatsar in the Ferozepur district of Punjab. Lahina was the son of a trader called Pheru. He was a Khatri. He married a lady called Khivi, and by her, he had a daughter Amro and two sons Dasu and Datu.

Lahina was a devotee of the Goddess Durga of Jwalamukhi. He paid regular annual visits to that temple. One day he heard a Sikh of Khadur, named Jodha, sing some lines of Guru Nanak: "Ever remember that Lord, by worshipping whom thou shalt find happiness. Do absolutely no evil. Look well before thee. So throw the dice that thou mayest not lose with the Lord, nay, that thou mayest gain some profit". The song touched Lahina's heart very much. He asked Jodha who the author was. He came to know that it was Jodha's Guru, Nanak. Then he proceeded to Khartarpur and met Guru Nanak. He lost all desire to adore Durga. He determined to become the servant of Nanak.

On one occasion Lahina found the Guru in his fields unable to transport three bundles of grass to his cow at home. The grass was wet and muddy. The Guru's sons, Srichand and Lakshmandas, and other Sikhs who were with the Guru, refused to carry the bundles. Lahina lifted on his head all the three bundles and carried them to Nanak's home. Nanak's wife reproached Nanak for allowing a visitor spoil his clothes by carrying muddy bundles. But the Guru replied: "This is not mud. It is saffron of God's court which marks the elect". As Nanak spoke, the mud on Lahina's clothes turned to saffron. The three bundles are today considered by the devoted Sikhs to symbolize spiritual affairs, temporal affairs and Guruship.

Lahina was very faithful and sincere. He was intensely devoted to Guru Nanak. Lahina gave ocular proof of his sincerity and devotion. Guru Nanak declared Lahina to be his successor in 1537 A.D. Lahina was seated on the throne or Gaddi. Guru Nanak placed before Angad five pies and a coconut, bowed before him and went four times round him. Nanak declared that from that moment his own spirit had gone into Lahina's body and that Lahina must be considered as he himself. Lahina's name was then changed to Angi Khud or Angad (my own body). Thus the Sikhs began to entertain a strong belief that the spirit or the spiritual light of Nanak was inherited by each successor Guru.

Guru Angad was Nanak's most devoted servant. He closely followed the instructions of his Guru. He was always true to the principles of his Great Master. He used to earn his livelihood by twisting coarse twine made of Munj. He was ever engaged in meditation. He gave food to persons of all creeds. He recorded the experiences of his own devotional practices and meditation which were later incorporated into the *Adi Granth* and endeavoured his level best to carry out the mission he was entrusted with. He was not a very talented man, but he put in writing that which he heard from his Guru and that which was narrated to him by Bala, an old companion of Guru Nanak. Angad lived as Guru for nearly thirteen years and passed away at Khadur in 1553 A.D.

Emperor Humayun was driven by Sher Shah from Bengal to Hindustan. Humayun came to Lahore to find out a Siddha Purusha or perfected saint with Siddhis who would help him to get back his lost dominion. He heard of Guru Angad and went to Khadur. He took many presents with him and hoped to win Angad's favour by offering those presents. Angad was in deep meditation at that time. Humayun had to wait for some time. He became very angry. He put his hand on his sword hilt and wanted to draw his sword to cut the head of Angad. The sword would not leave its scabbard. Angad said, "When you ought to have used your sword against Sher Shah, you did not. Now, when you have come to a saint, you want to draw your sword instead of saluting him".

Humayun apologized and became quiet. Angad said, "If you had not put your hand on your sword hilt, you should at once have got back your dominion. Now go to Persia. When you return, you will get back your kingdom".

The prophecy was fulfilled. Humayun was driven out of India. He returned to India and recovered his dominion after the death of Sher Shah.

Mana, a Sikh, was the cook of Angad. He became very fatty and haughty on account of luxurious living. He always quarrelled with the other servants and became very slothful and lazy. Guru Angad got tired of Mana and said, "Mana, go to the forest and cremate yourself". Mana went to the forest, collected wood and set fire to it. The more the fire blazed, the less Mana liked the idea of jumping into it. Now a thief appeared before Mana and asked him what he was doing. Mana told his story to the thief. He highly eulogized the virtues of his Guru whom he was really fond of. The thief was very much moved by the speech of Mana. He gave Mana the bundle of golden ornaments he had stolen. Mana assured the thief that he would thereby obtain emancipation. The thief trusted the words of Mana, took the place of Mana and jumped into the fire. When the body of the thief had been well burnt, Mana went to the bazaar and tried to sell the ornaments. He was arrested on suspicion. The ornaments were given back to the owner. Mana was hanged. When Guru Angad heard the sad end of Mana, he said, "It is very true that a man with perverted intellect loses both the worlds. Man does not obtain emancipation even if he lives near the Guru, if foolishness does not leave his heart".

One day a man called Govind came to Angad and said, "Adorable Guru! I took a vow that if I won in a law suit, I would found a city in your honour and call it after your name. I have now won the law suit. I have also obtained from the Emperor a grant of land on the bank of the Beas river. I have started the construction also. The masons work very vigorously, but some mischievous demons pull down the rising walls at night. Kindly drive away the demons and allow me to give the new town the honour of your name".

Angad said, "Do not be troubled about mundane affairs.

There is nothing dearer to man than the True Name". He gave Amardas, his disciple, his walking stick. Amardas drove the demons with the walking stick of Guru Angad and marked out the town. Amardas gave it the name of Govindwal in honour of the builder. Now also it is known as Govindwal.

An ascetic of Khadur became jealous of Angad. There was famine in that year. The villagers went to the ascetic and requested him to help them. The ascetic said that the famine had been sent by God to punish them for their sin in honouring a married Guru like Angad, instead of respecting whole-heartedly a true anchorite or Sannyasin like himself. He said, "If you expel him from the town, you shall have rain in twenty-four hours". The villagers were excited by the promises of the ascetic. They went to Angad and said, "Call down the rain yourself or leave the town". Angad declined to call down rain. The villagers drove Angad from Khadur. The ascetic was very much pleased at the expulsion of Angad. The villagers now requested the ascetic to fulfil his promise and bring rain. He put them off with vain promises for some time. At last they lost all patience and beat the ascetic very severely and drove him out also at the instigation of Amardas. Thereupon they brought Angad back to Khadur. Angad rebuked Amardas and said, "You should develop forgiveness and do good to everyone irrespective of his acts. You should treat gold and dross as the same. You should practise humility, because the humble shall ever be exalted. The pearl is small, but consider its price. Think of the tiny fruit of the banyan tree, yet, to what a great size it grows, filling the whole forest!".

Just as Guru Nanak had preferred a disciple to his own sons while choosing a successor, so also Angad chose Amardas as his successor, rather than one of his own sons. When Angad's life began to near its end, he bathed Amardas, a Khatri of Basarka near Amritsar, clothed him and placed him in the Guru's seat. He put five copper coins and a coconut before Amardas. Bhai Budha, another favourite disciple, put on the forehead of Amardas the Tilak or mark of Guruship.

Angad fixed his thoughts on Guru Nanak, and with the word, "*Vahe Guru*" on his lips, passed away from the transitory world in 1552 A.D. His body was burnt on a pyre of sandalwood.

GURU AMARDAS

Guru Amardas was a Khatri of the Bhalla clan. He was born at Basarka, in the Phaganah of Amritsar, in 1479 A.D.

Amardas was a man of humble birth. He supported himself by hiring a pony which he used for carrying goods from place to place. He immensely liked the company of saints. He was in quest of a noble spiritual preceptor. He was a Vaishnavite. He heard the recitation of certain hymns of Guru Nanak and was very much impressed. He came to Khadur at the age of sixty-two and accepted Guru Angad as his Guru. He served his Guru whole-heartedly and sacrificed his own comfort for the sake of the Guru. Every midnight, he brought from the river Beas, which was about four miles from Khadur, fresh water for the Guru's morning ablutions. He performed this work daily without fail, whatever was the season or the weather. He went to the forest to bring firewood for the kitchen. He was ever engaged in repeating in his mind the Name of the Lord even while discharging his duties.

Amardas never used to eat anything from the Guru's storehouse. His reverence to the Guru was so great that he never turned his back towards him or his house. On all occasions he used to walk backwards, with his face turned towards the Guru's house. During his midnight journey to the river, he used to walk backwards, keeping on all occasions his face towards the house of his Guru. He never made even the least mention of his services.

One day Amardas was returning with water from the river. It was a dark night when there was thunder, lightning and rain. Amardas accidentally tumbled down by striking against a peg which was close to a weaver's house. He fell into the weaver's loom pit. He got out of the pit with the pitcher full of water. The weaver heard the noise and asked his wife, "Who is that man who is roaming about at dead of night?". She replied, "It must be that wretched, homeless

Amardas, who serves the Guru for the sake of a piece of bread".

This news reached the ears of Guru Angad. He said, "Amru is not homeless, but he is the home of the homeless, the stronghold of the defenceless, the shelter of the shelterless, the stronghold of the strengthless, the support of the supportless, the friend of the friendless, and a prop to the world and its faith. He who will follow him shall find his home with the Lord".

Amardas was declared to be the successor to Guru Angad. Guru Angad bowed down before Amardas, then presented five pies and a coconut to him and walked round him four times as was done by Guru Nanak.

After the death of Angad, his son Datu tried to usurp his father's place. He used the following proclamation: "Amru is old. He is my servant. I am Prince of the Guru's line. The Guru's throne is mine".

The Sikhs did not recognize Datu. Datu became jealous of the fame of Guru Amardas, attacked him and kicked him out of the throne at Govindwal. He said, "Only yesterday you were a water-carrier in our house and today you sit as a Guru".

The Guru replied meekly, "O Great King! Pardon me. Thou must have hurt thy foot". He left Govindwal and went to his native place Basarka.

The Sikhs did not pay any respect to Datu. They did not carry any offerings. Datu put on a camel all the wealth that he could find in Amardas' house and proceeded to Khadur. He was attacked by dacoits on the way. They took all his wealth. When he protested, one of the dacoits struck him with a stick on the very foot which kicked Guru Amardas. The foot swelled up very much and gave Datu terrible pain.

Amardas settled himself at Govindwal, the seat of his Guru. He obtained great reputation as a teacher and preacher. He made several converts. Akbar himself heard his discourses with rapt attention. Amardas was just, wise, humble and patient. He widely propagated the mission of Guru Nanak. He composed many beautiful hymns which were very much liked for their simplicity of diction and purity of thought and later incorporated in the *Adi Granth.* He sent twenty-two of his chosen disciples to various parts of the country in order to preach the religion of Nanak.

Amardas separated the inert Udasis, a sect founded by Srichand, son of Nanak, from the active and dynamic Sikhs. He organized and maintained a public kitchen on a very wide scale. It was open to all creeds and classes. Brahmins, Khatris, Vaishyas and Sudras took food simultaneously in the same Pangat or line with no distinction whatsoever. The whole of the income from offerings was spent daily on the kitchen. No one could ask whether the food was prepared by a Brahmin or a low-caste Sikh. Amardas issued an order that nobody could go to see him unless he had taken the food cooked in the kitchen. The Raja of Haripur in the Kangra district was allowed to see the Guru after he had eaten the food in the kitchen.

Emperor Akbar also took the food prepared in the kitchen. He offered twelve villages in Jagir for the maintenance of the kitchen. Guru Amardas declined to accept the same. He said that the Lord Himself was maintaining the kitchen and no external help was necessary. Akbar made a gift of the villages to the Guru's daughter Bibi Bheni.

Amardas did not approve of Sati. He stopped it. He changed the form of marriage ceremonials and death ceremonials.

Amardas built, at Govindwal, a Bawali, a large oblong tank with eighty-four steps, landing places, and chambers for travellers' camping. Bathing in this tank, while repeating the *Japji,* is considered very meritorious. Two fairs are held here annually in memory of this Guru. Countless Sikhs attend the fairs.

On one occasion the Sikhs asked the Guru, "O adorable Guru, what are the attributes of a true Sikh?". Guru Amardas replied, "Just as a mother-of-pearl, on getting a drop of rain, becomes satisfied and goes down to the bottom to produce a pearl, so also should a Sikh become satisfied and contented when he gets the Guru Mantra or the Lord's Name for repetition. He should ever repeat the Name of the Lord. He should consider that the world and its wealth belong to the Lord. He should have a balanced mind in prosperity and in adversity. He should worship the one Lord, who alone is competent to do anything. He should implicitly rely on Him alone. He should not worship any tomb or burning ground".

On another occasion, a goldsmith of Govindwal and his wife threw themselves at the feet of the Guru and begged him for a child. The Guru humorously asked, "Do I keep children always with me to be given to people?". The goldsmith replied, "There are children in the mere words of the Guru". Guru Amardas was pleased with the goldsmith and said, "You shall have two children". The wife of the goldsmith bore, in due course, two sons.

Amardas had two sons, Mohan and Mohri and two daughters, Dani and Bibi Bheni. Bheni was given in marriage to Ramdas, who was commonly called Jetha. Dani was married to Rama of Guru Nanak's family.

Amardas told Jetha to excavate two tanks. Jetha obeyed the orders of the Guru. One was named Santoksar or the Lake of Satisfaction; the other Amritsar or the Lake of Nectar. Thus was the famous city of Amritsar founded.

Amardas resolved to test his two sons-in-law. He ordered them to build him a platform each in order that he might sit on one in the morning and on the other in the evening. Rama's platform was completed first, but the Guru, objected to it and ordered Rama to pull it down and build another. Rama acted accordingly, but the Guru was again displeased and made him pull it down again. Rama obeyed. But when the Guru objected for the third time, Rama pulled it down and refused to rebuild it. He said, "The Guru has grown old and his reason has failed".

The Guru then treated Jetha in the same manner. Jetha pulled down the platform seven times without any murmur and rebuilt it. The Guru embraced him and said, "Obeying my order, seven times you have built the platform; so, seven generations of thine shall sit on the Guru's throne".

Bheni obtained an assurance from her father, Guru Amardas, that the successions should remain with her posterity.

In 1574 A.D., the Guru declared Jetha to be his successor. Two days later he died at the age of 95 years at Govindwal. He had begun to serve Guru Angad at the age of 62. He had served him for twelve years and reigned as Guru for twenty-two years.

GURU RAMDAS

Guru Ramdas was a Sodhi Khatri. He was born at Chuni Mandi in the town of Lahore in 1534 A.D. When he was about seven years of age, his father died. Ramdas went to Govindwal and began to earn his bread by selling boiled pulses and other eatables. One day Guru Amardas was about to send a Brahmin to find out a suitable match for his daughter Bibi Bheni. Ramdas passed through the street selling pulses as usual. The wife of Amardas said to the Brahmin, "I want a son-in-law like Ramdas".

Guru Amardas said, "Let the specimen be the real son-in-law". Thereupon Amardas sent a man to bring Ramdas. He gave his daughter Bheni in marriage to Ramdas. A separate house was built for Ramdas at Govindwal. Ramdas had three sons—Prithichand, Mahadeo and Arjun. Amardas installed Ramdas as Guru, as he found him to be a man worthy of that high office.

Guru Ramdas was a man of considerable merit. He had a peaceful disposition. He was a man of wonderful eloquence and energy. He devoted himself to literary pursuits and poetical compositions, and expounded his doctrines in beautiful and attractive hymns. Some of his hymns have been incorporated in the *Adi Granth*. He was very liberal. He is the most revered among the Gurus.

Srichand, the elder son of Guru Nanak, founded a sect of his own, known as the Udasis or persons indifferent to this world. One day Srichand went to visit Guru Ramdas and said to him, "What a long beard have you grown!". Ramdas replied, "Yes, I have grown a long beard so that I may wipe thy feet". Ramdas did actually wipe Srichand's feet with his beard. This act of extreme humility put Srichand to shame. Srichand admitted Ramdas' right to headship of the Sikh community.

Ramdas pressed the Sikhs to marry and beget children. He was not in favour of asceticism.

Guru Ramdas had an interview with Emperor Akbar at Lahore. Akbar came to know that Ramdas was serving the poor and the afflicted. He granted Guru Ramdas a piece of land. Ramdas restored an old tank there and renamed it Amritsagar or the Pool of Immortality. He also built a temple in the middle of the tank. Smaller temples were built around the tank. The followers of the Guru built several huts. The new town was named *Guru ka Chak.* Later on, it was called by the name 'Amritsar' by which name it is known to this day.

Ramdas had great sympathy for the poor. He helped the agricultural classes more. So he was called by the people "*Saccha Badsha*" or the "True King".

Guru Ramdas infused brotherly love in the Sikhs. He exerted much for promoting the faith of Guru Nanak. He laid deep the foundation of the future greatness of the Sikhs as a nation by founding the town of Amritsar. The Golden Temple of Amritsar became the common place of worship. The Sikhs learnt to unite together and foster the feelings of brotherly love which paved a long way in the formation of a commonwealth based on genuine patriotic principles.

Prithi was worldly-minded, crooked and selfish. Ramdas nominated Arjun Singh as his successor. Ramdas died in 1581 at the age of 47 years at Govindwal. He reigned as Guru for nearly seven years.

Ramdas gave the express command to Arjun to complete the two tanks at Amritsar.

GURU ARJUN SINGH

Guru Arjun Dev, the fifth Guru, was born in 1563 A.D. He was in the *Gaddi* from 1581 to 1606. Guru Arjun was the youngest son of Guru Ramdas, the fourth Guru. Prithichand, the eldest son, was disobedient. He was a liar. So his father excommunicated him and ordered the Sikhs not to associate with him. The second son Mahadev was always engaged in deep meditation. He shunned society. The youngest, Arjun, was capable in all respects and was, therefore, installed in the office of Guru in 1581 A.D. at Amritsar. Guru Amardas prophesied, "This grandson Arjun shall be a boat to take mankind across the ocean of this world".

Arjun constructs the Tank and the Golden Temple

Guru Ramdas dug the tank of Amritsar and laid the foundation of the city. Guru Arjun completed the construction of the tank and the city. He also constructed the holy *Har Mandir* (Temple of God), better known as the *Darbar Sahib* or the *Golden Temple* of Amritsar. His followers said to the Guru that the temple should be raised higher than all the neighbouring buildings. Guru Arjun replied, "No, what is humble should be exalted. The more a tree is laden with fruits, the more its branches come down to the earth. You must descend eight or ten steps by whatever way you approach the temple. Therefore let the Har Mandir be made the lowest building of all".

Guru Arjun laid the first brick of the Golden Temple in 1589. A mason accidentally displaced the brick. Arjun prophesied that the foundations would some time have to be relaid. This prophesy came true. In 1763 A.D., the Afghan king Ahmed Shah Abdali destroyed the temple and defiled the tank. Two years later, the Sikhs recovered the ruins, relaid the foundations and rebuilt the temple with greater splendour.

Guru Arjun played the most prominent part in strengthening and spreading the faith of the Sikh Gurus. He put aside the rosary and the garb of a saint and put on costly dress. He maintained a numerous retinue, fine horses and elephants. He organized the Sikhs into a community. He had a regular system of government. People had to pay a tax of one-tenth of their income. Collectors were appointed to collect the revenue. He sent his disciples to foreign countries like Turkistan for purposes of trade and to spread the faith. Sikhism was extended to Kabul, Kandahar, Sind and Malwa.

In the design of the Har Mandir, Guru Arjun made an important departure from the ordinary temple. Hindu temples are closed on three sides and open only to the east or the rising sun. The great Sikh temple was built open on all sides. This meant that the Sikh worship was open to all and was not concerned with sun-worship.

Arjun compiles the Adi Granth

Guru Arjun compiled the *Adi Granth* or the *Granth Sahib.* He collected all the hymns of his predecessors in one volume. He thought that this sacred book would be a guide to the Sikhs for all time. He incorporated in this *Adi Granth* his own compositions as well as select hymns of other religious reformers of those times. Bhai Guru Das, the reputed Sikh poet, wrote the *Granth Sahib* at the dictation of the Guru. The *Granth Sahib* is kept in the holy temple at Amritsar in the middle and recited each day before the congregation.

Prithia's evil deeds

Prithichand, the eldest brother of Guru Arjun, resented his own supersession in the nomination to the Guru's *Gaddi* by Guru Ramdas. Because of this, he was always inimical towards the Guru. He tried his level best to remove Arjun from the Guruship. He brought various law suits against him, but he was always unsuccessful. The Guru generously granted certain taxes and house rents to Prithia. He gave the customs duties of a single quarter of Amritsar to Mahadev, the other brother. Arjun reserved for himself the voluntary offerings of his faithful followers.

Prithia's jealousy towards Guru Arjun Singh was to a great extent fanned by his wife Karmo. Prithia hoped that as Guru Arjun had no son, his own son Mihrban would obtain the succession.

After some years, Ganga, the wife of Guru Arjun, brought forth a son named Har Govind. The news of this event filled Prithia and Karmo with anger. Prithia's dislike of his brother turned to malignant hatred. He made various efforts to poison Har Govind. Once he sent a nurse with poison smeared on her bosom to suckle little Har Govind, but before she could give the child her breast, she fell back in a faint. When she recovered, she confessed the evil deed she had come to do. Another time Prithia offered a snake charmer a large reward to kill Har Govind by snake-bite. This also proved a failure. Prithia then hired a Brahmin to poison the child's milk, but the Guru suspected the Brahmin and gave the milk to a dog; and it died.

Prithia instigated Sulahi Khan, a Mussalman officer of the Lahore province, to plunder Amritsar on the pretext of levying a tribute from the city. He went to Akbar with false charges against Guru Arjun. The great Emperor did not listen to Prithia's complaints. He dismissed the petition of Prithia as false. Akbar visited the Guru and gave dresses of honour. He gave gold Mohur to honour the book *Adi Granth*. He was highly pleased with the temple that the Guru had constructed. He called himself the Guru's slave and asked for instructions from him. As he became very much pleased with the Guru's hospitality and learning, he remitted the revenues of Punjab for that year as an offering to the Guru.

Guru Arjun organized his followers into a political community. He converted a large number of people to the Sikh faith. He converted the hill Rajas of Kulu, Chamba, Mandi, Haripur and Chuket. He disseminated the Sikh faith in Kashmir also.

Chandu Shah's intrigue

Besides Prithichand, the Guru had another enemy in Chandu Shah, Dewan and finance minister of Emperor Akbar. Arjun Singh declined to betroth his son Har Govind to Sada Kaur, the daughter of Chandu Shah. Chandu Shah was very rich. Chandu Shah made some disparaging remarks. He compared the Guru to a drain and himself to the upper storey. By this he meant that he was going to give the hand of his daughter to a person who was much lower in social status than himself. Chandu Shah said to the priest, "Thou wisheth to put the ornamental tile of a top storey to the gutter". The Sikhs communicated these slighting remarks to the Guru with a request that the betrothal be refused. It was refused accordingly and the betrothal presents were returned.

Chandu Shah became very angry, but he tried to smoothen out matters by writing to Guru Arjun and withdrawing all that he had said. He also threatened that he would, in the absence of a settlement, become Prithia's ally. Guru Arjun did not send a reply. Chandu Shah now became the deadly enemy of Guru Arjun.

Chandu Shah informed Emperor Akbar that the Mohammedan faith and its prophecy were slighted and slandered in the *Adi Granth.* Akbar sent for the *Adi Granth.* Guru Arjun Singh's writings and the writings of the other Gurus were examined. The tolerant Akbar found no fault with them. He dismissed the Guru with many costly presents.

Shortly afterwards, the great Akbar died and his son Jahangir ascended the throne. Jahangir's son Khusru rebelled. Beaten in the field, Khusru fled towards Afghanistan. On the way, he passed through the Guru's dwelling place in Taran Taran and got rupees five thousand to defray his expenses in the course of his journey to Kabul.

Chandu, Prithia, and even Mihrban, the son of Prithia, joined together to rouse the fire of Emperor Jahangir against the Guru. They informed the Emperor that the Guru had not only helped, but blessed Khusru and foretold that he would occupy the throne.

The Emperor sent for the Guru and said to him, "You look on all, rich and poor, alike. It was not proper for you to give money to my enemy Khusru".

The Guru Arjun replied, "I regard all people, whether Hindu or Muslim, rich or poor, friend or foe, without love or hate. That is the reason why I gave your son some money for his journey and not because he was your enemy. If I had not assisted him in his helpless state and so shown some regard for the kindness of thy father, the Emperor Akbar, to myself, all men would have despised me for my heartlessness and ingratitude, or they would have said that I was afraid of thee.

This would have been unworthy of a follower of Guru Nanak. I had no intention to help the king's enemy".

The Emperor ordered the Guru to pay a fine of two lakhs of rupees and to remove from the Granth Sahib all hymns which offended Hindus and Mussalmans.

Guru Arjun Singh replied, "I am a saint. Whatever I have has come to me through offerings. This is public property. It is meant for the poor and the Sadhus. If you are in need of any pecuniary help, I am quite prepared to render that help. You may take whatever I have. But if you ask by way of fine, I shall not give you even a Kauri or pie, because a fine is imposed on worldly persons and not on priests and saints. I cannot remove or change any hymn in the *Granth Sahib* even a bit. I adore one immortal God, the Supreme Soul. There is no emperor except Him. Whatever He revealed to the Gurus is written in the sacred *Granth Sahib*. The hymns are not disrespectful to any Hindu incarnation or any Mohammedan prophet. My chief aim is the dissemination of truth and the annihilation of falsehood. I am really blessed if I will have to give up this body in pursuance of this aim".

When the Sikhs of Lahore heard of this imposition of the fine, they proposed to pay it by raising subscriptions. But Guru Arjun did not allow this.

The Guru was handed over to Chandu Shah. Chandu Shah brought the Guru to his own house. There he insisted upon the Guru's accepting the betrothal which had already been refused. He promised a very large dowry. The Guru said that his words were engraved on stone and could not be effaced. He added that even if the whole world were given as dowry, the Guru's son would not marry Chandu Shah's daughter.

Chandu Shah tortures Arjun

Thereupon, Chandu Shah threatened the Guru with the most cruel treatment. The Guru replied that fate could not be averted and expressed his willingness to suffer it. The Guru was treated with the utmost cruelty. Marks of violence were visible on his whole body. He was thrown into prison. The Brahmins and the Kazis tortured him in various ways. For five days the Guru suffered untold torture at the hands of the vindictive Chandu Shah. Chandu Shah's agents poured burning sand on the Guru, seated him on red-hot cauldrons and plunged him in boiling water. The Guru did not make even a sigh or a groan.

The Guru said, "The egg of superstition has burst. The mind is illumined. The Guru has cut the fetters off the feet and freed the captive. My transmigration is at an end. The load of my Karma is removed. I am freed therefrom. From the sea I have reached the shore. The Guru has done me the favour. Truth is my place, truth my seat and truth I have made my special object. Truth is the capital. Truth is the stock-in-trade which Nanak has put into his house".

Chandu Shah offered to stop the torture if the Guru would consent to Har Govind's marriage to Sada Kaur. The Guru rejected the offer.

Mian Mir, a well-known saint, warned Chandu Shah of the injudicious step he was taking. He told the Guru that he would complain to the Emperor and bring ruin upon his tormentor. The Guru said, "Toleration is the duty of a saint. Violence, cruelty and dishonour test a saint. Nobody can do anything except the all-powerful Lord. Sorrow and happiness are predestined for the body. The soul is separate from it. Steel cannot cut it, fire cannot burn it and water cannot dissolve it. My maxim is: 'O Lord, if Thou grantest happiness, I will repeat Thy Name; and in distress too, I must invoke Thee' ".

Guru Arjun's end

Chandu Shah laid before the Guru a raw cowhide and said that he would be covered with it the next morning. When the hide was brought before the Guru, he asked permission to bathe in the river Ravi. The Guru took his bath as usual and disappeared while reciting with intense devotion the *Japji*!

Guru Arjun told the Sikhs near him: "Appoint Har Govind as my successor. Bid him not to mourn or indulge in unmanly lamentations, but let him sing God's praises; let him sit fully armed on his throne and maintain the strongest army that he can".

Guru Arjun passed away in 1606. He finished the Amritsar tank, built the Golden Temple and compiled the *Granth Sahib.* He gave to his disciples an immortal example of loyalty, faith and courage. He reigned as Guru for twenty-four years from 1581 to 1606.

Sikhism passed from a sect of devotees to a military organization. The death of Guru Arjun gave a new turn to the history of the Sikh nation. It inflamed the religious passions of the Sikhs. Measures were adopted to pay the cruel tyrant in his own coin.

A temple dedicated to Guru Arjun stands opposite the Fort of Lahore.

GURU HAR GOVIND

Guru Har Govind, the son of Guru Arjun, was born in 1595 A.D. at Vadali in Amritsar district. He was installed as Guru when he was eleven years old. He combined in himself the qualities of a warrior and a saint. He became a military as well as a spiritual leader. He was the first Guru who organized a military system, armed his followers and fully prepared them for fighting in the battlefield. He engaged the services of the brave and drilled them in arms. They matured into a strong group of combatants in a very short time. Those Hindus who had thought of embracing Islam under coercion looked to Guru Har Govind for comfort and protection.

The new spiritual leader of the Sikhs was suited in both body and temper to carry out his father's wishes and maintain an army. He did not wear the cord and turban of his predecessors. He wore arms and armour and shone like the sun. He gave every combatant a horse and a weapon.

Guru Har Govind issued a letter to all the *Masands* who used to collect offerings and tithes from the Sikhs that he would be pleased with those who brought offerings of arms and horses instead of money. The *Masands* or tithe-collectors presented, according to the old custom, a Manji (bedstead), a Seli (a woollen thread worn by the Fakirs), a hat, a religious book and a rosary. The Guru returned them and said, "I am going to change the doctrine of the rosary to that of the sword. My mission is to protect the faith of the Lord. I cannot protect the faith without the help of arms. I am going to wear arms, two swords, one on each side. I am going to abandon the Seli and the Topi—the marks of a Fakir—for good. My one sword represents *Fakiri*; it is an emblem of spirituality. The other represents *Amiri*; it is an emblem of royalty or temporal authority."

Chandu Shah became alarmed at the growing power of his dead enemy's son. He made a last effort to conciliate Har

Govind and induce him to marry his still unwedded daughter. He threatened Har Govind that unless the latter consented, he would treat him as he had treated Guru Arjun. Har Govind rejected Chandu Shah's offer and wrote a letter to him in which he threatened a fearful vengeance for the tortures inflicted on his father. He wrote, "Thou shalt die trodden in the dust and dishonoured by shoe-beating inflicted by low-caste men".

Har Govind constructed Akal-bunga in front of the Sikh temple at Amritsar. He said to his followers that he should be considered as a saint when he remained in *Har Mandir* and as a king when he remained in *Akal-bunga*. He dressed himself in a costly and princely dress. He issued an order to the Sikhs to present him with arms on their usual visits of pilgrimage.

Har Govind secured the confidence of Emperor Jahangir. He had eight hundred horses and well-equipped followers. He followed the imperial army on his journey to Kashmir. The Emperor deputed Har Govind to subdue Raja Tarachand of Nalagarh who was unconquerable. The Guru defeated him and brought him before the Emperor. Now new honours were conferred upon the Guru. He was made commander of 7 guns and 1000 horsemen and soldiers. He was also invested with the power to decide judicial cases. His popularity as a spiritual leader and temporal judge largely increased his power and fame. He was termed by the people "*Saccha Badsha*" and "*Sodhi Sultan*". He was their true king. Har Govind saved the Emperor's life when the latter was hunting. The Emperor had heard that Har Govind was an expert in hunting. So he took Har Govind with him when he went out for hunting. A wounded tiger charged at the Emperor and was killed at the last moment by a sword-cut of the Guru.

Har Govind was very generous and charitable. He maintained a public kitchen on a very large scale. Thousands of poor Hindus and Mohammedans were fed.

Har Govind established many public institutions and constructed many gardens. He founded Hargovindpur in 1677. He toured the country for preaching the mission of Guru Nanak.

Mihrban, the son of Prithichand, paternal uncle of Har Govind, became very jealous on seeing the prosperity of the

Guru and joined with Chandu Shah. They both complained to Emperor Jahangir that the Guru had given up the practice of his ancestors and organized a regular army and had begun to dispose of judicial cases as in the king's law courts. Chandu Shah reminded the Emperor of the imposition of a fine of two lakhs on the deceased Guru Arjun and suggested its recovery from the son. He suggested that until the amount was paid, the Guru should be kept in the Fort of Gwalior as a state prisoner. The Emperor agreed to the suggestion of Chandu Shah. Guru Har Govind was put in jail.

Har Govind remained in the jail for twelve years. The Guru found a number of unfortunate Rajas and nobles imprisoned. Their only crime had been to possess territories that the Imperial Government coveted. Har Govind was highly useful to many of his fellow prisoners. He contrived to release them.

Chandu Shah thought that he could easily murder Har Govind in the jail. He tried to bribe Haridas, the governor of the fort, to murder Har Govind. He sent a poisoned robe for the Guru to wear. But Haridas was a great devotee of the Guru. The famous Fakir, Mian Mir, spoke to the Emperor all about the wicked deeds of Chandu Shah and obtained the release of Har Govind.

The Guru went to Delhi to thank the Emperor. The Emperor found a beautiful rosary of yellow wooden beads on the neck of the Guru and asked for it as a keepsake. The Guru said that his father had worn a far more beautiful rosary of pearls and he wished to give that to the Emperor. The Emperor asked the Guru where it was. The Guru replied that Chandu Shah had it, having stolen it from Guru Arjun's neck. The Emperor asked Chandu Shah to bring it. Chandu Shah went to his house and came back without it. He pretended that he had lost it. Guru Har Govind told Jahangir all about the sufferings of his father. The Emperor at once changed his opinion about Chandu Shah and became very bitter against him. When Chandu Shah came back without the necklace, the Emperor asked Har Govind to take him away and take vengeance on him for his father's terrible end. Har Govind refused to take Chandu Shah and said, "The true Guru is generous and compassionate. He feels compassion for ever. The true Guru wishes well to all".

The house of Chandu Shah was searched. The rosary of pearls was found.

The followers of Guru Har Govind took Chandu Shah to Amritsar. They made him expiate his cruelty to Guru Arjun. They pelted him with mud and filth. They had him beaten by low-caste men with slippers. They took him round daily to beg food. A grain parcher fractured his skull with an iron ladle. Sweepers threw his body into the river Ravi.

Mihrban, the son of Prithia, and Karam Chand, the son of Chandu Shah, poisoned Shah Jahan's mind against the Guru. The Guru was sporting near the village Gumtala. Shah Jahan was sporting at the same time in the vicinity of Kuhala. A white hawk belonging to the Emperor joined the hawks belonging to the Guru. The Emperor's men claimed the white hawk. The Guru refused to part with it.

Now Shah Jahan became very angry. He sent an armed force to seize the Guru and disperse his followers. A severe battle was fought near Amritsar. The Emperor's army was defeated. The Guru won three pitched battles against the Imperial troops.

The Guru had three wives—Damodari, by whom he had a son Gurditta; Nanaki, by whom he had three sons—Ani Rai, Tej Bahadur and Atal Rai; and Marwahi, by whom he had a son Surajmal.

Guru Har Govind established himself at Khartarpur near the hills where he died in 1645. Before that he nominated his grandson Har Rai as the next Guru. Guru Har Govind had been Guru for thirty-seven years. He died at the age of forty-eight.

Guru Har Govind was a great man. He was a great hero and a great spiritual leader.

The Sikhs had great love and respect for Guru Har Govind. His death was considered as a national calamity. Many of his followers volunteered to burn themselves on his funeral pyre. Two of them, a Rajput and a Jat, expired at the feet of the Guru.

Guru Har Govind was respected by the Hindus and the Mohammedans alike. He had constructed at convenient stages, between Hargovindpur and Amritsar, Masjids and Dehras for Mohammedan travellers. They were fed there at the expense of the Guru.

GURU HAR RAI

Guru Har Rai was born in 1630 A.D. of Gurditta's wife Nihal Kaur or Nathi at Kiratpur. He was a quiet and contented man. He had no inclination for warfare. He preferred a peaceful and retired life.

Gurditta, the son of Guru Har Govind, came by an untimely end when he was only twenty-four years old. He had been hunting, and during the chase, one of his Sikhs killed a cow mistaking it for a deer. The cowherds would not free him unless Gurditta restored the cow to life. Gurditta, although he had the power, did not wish to do so as the Guru, his father, disliked such miracles. At last, to save his follower, he put his cane on the cow's head and said, "Arise and eat grass". At these words the cow got up and joined the herd. The Guru became very angry when he heard of the miracle. He said, "It is not pleasing to me that you should set yourself up as God's equal and restore life to the dead". Gurditta was deeply affected by his father's rebuke. He took his leave respectfully and walked to the tomb of Budhan Shah. Close to the tomb he spread the bedding of grass, drove the cane into the ground, lay down and gave up his soul. The father was rather glad to hear of it.

Guru Har Rai helped Dara Shikoh, son of Shah Jahan, in the struggle for the throne.

Prince Aurangazeb put some tiger's whiskers in the food of his brother Prince Dara Shikoh in order to get rid of him. Dara Shikoh got very ill. The best doctors decided that only one medicine would cure him. It was myrobalan weighing twenty-eight ounces and a clove weighing one Masha. Such a big myrobalan and such a big clove were nowhere to be found. The Emperor was advised to apply to Guru Har Rai. Shah Jahan was at first not willing to do so. Later on he sent a humble letter to the Guru. The Guru took from his storehouse a myrobalan and a clove of the size needed and gave them to the imperial messenger. To those he added a pearl to be ground into powder and mixed with the other medicine. This was given to Dara. The tiger's whiskers were driven out of his system and he regained his health.

Later on, however, Dara was captured by Aurangazeb and put to death.

Har Rai tried to make peace with the new Emperor Aurangazeb. Aurangazeb asked Har Rai to appear in the Imperial Court, but the Guru, fearing treachery, sent his eldest son Ram Rai instead. Aurangazeb kept Ram Rai in his court for a long period and treated him with great respect. Ram Rai had strict orders from his father to be true to his faith and never to swerve from it whatever the circumstances might be.

Aurangazeb used to hear much from Ram Rai about the Sikh religion. He highly revered the *Holy Granth*. He was of the opinion that the principles of Sikhism were in accordance with the tenets of Islam. One day Aurangazeb came across a sentence in the Sikh scripture in Rag Asa and asked Ram Rai about its meaning. That sentence related to the sufferings of the body of a Mussalman after his death. The ashes of the Mussalman fall into the potter's clod; vessels and bricks are fashioned from them; they cry out as they burn. Ram Rai thought that it would offend the Emperor who was very bigoted. Therefore he substituted the word "Beiman" (faithless) for "Mussalman" in order to please him.

This news reached the ears of Guru Har Rai. The Guru said that no mortal could change the sayings of Guru Nanak and that the man who had dared to do so should never be seen by him. He passed an order that no true Sikh should have any connection with Ram Rai or his progeny and he who violated that order would be excommunicated.

The Guru said, "The Guruship is like tigress' milk which can be contained only in a golden cup. Only he who is ready to devote his life thereto is worthy of it. Let Ram Rai not look on my face again. Let him dwell with Aurangazeb and amass money in his court".

Ram Rai asked the Guru for forgiveness. He personally waited on his father at Kiratpur. Pardon was not granted. Ram

Rai's request for an interview was rejected. He was ordered to leave Kiratpur at once.

When Guru Har Rai felt his end near, he resolved to appoint Har Kishan as his successor without delay. In the presence of the assembled magnates, Har Rai seated Har Kishan, still a child, on the throne. He put a coconut and five pies before him and walked round him four times. Lastly he put a Tilak on the forehead of Har Kishan. The whole assembly rose up and did obeisance to the young Guru.

In 1661 Guru Har Rai passed away at the age of thirty-two at Kiratpur. He reigned as Guru for a period of seventeen years.

GURU HAR KISHAN

Guru Har Kishan was born in 1656 A.D. The new boy was only five years old at the time of his installation. He was installed in 1661. He was the second son of Guru Har Rai and his wife Kishan Kaur. He was appointed as Guru by his father because of the errors of Ram Rai. Ram Rai proclaimed himself as Guru. His disciples went through the land and tried to extract large sums of money. They gave only a small sum to Ram Rai. The rest they kept for themselves.

Guru Har Kishan had an acute intellect. He possessed high attainments. He gave instructions to the Sikhs and cleared their doubts.

Ram Rai laid his case before Aurangazeb. Aurangazeb saw in the quarrels of the brothers, if artfully fomented, a means of destroying the Sikh power. Aurangazeb issued orders to the Guru to repair to Delhi. Har Kishan went to Delhi and pleased the Emperor and his adviser Raja Ram Singh of Amber with his intelligence and wisdom. Aurangazeb received the Guru with great respect and sent Prince Mua Zam to pay him a visit as a mark of distinction.

Aurangazeb wished to test the spiritual powers of the little Guru. The little Guru was taken into the interior chambers of the Ranis. The Chief Queen put on the dress of a servant and sat at the back. The other Ranis and females of the royal family put on rich attire. The little Guru detected at once the Chief Rani in spite of her menial clothing.

Guru Har Kishan was seized with fever and small-pox, and knowing that his end was near, he nominated Tej Bahadur (Baba Bakala), his great uncle and the son of Har Govind who was living in retirement at the village of Bakala on the side of the river Beas.

Guru Har Kishan passed away in 1664 A.D. He reigned as Guru for three years.

GURU TEJ BAHADUR

Guru Tej Bahadur was the youngest son of Har Govind. He was born in 1621 A.D. at Amritsar. His mother was Nanaki. His father prophesied that he would become a mighty hero. He gave him the name Tej Bahadur or the Brave Sword and foretold that Tej Bahadur would beget a son who would overthrow the Moghul tyranny. Har Govind said that his son would be a great hero, powerful to endure the sword (Tegh). Hence the significant name—Tej Bahadur. When Guru Har Govind nominated his grandson Har Rai to succeed him, he consoled his wife Nanaki, the mother of Tej Bahadur, with the prophecy that her son would one day be Guru and they should be patient. He entrusted his arms to her with instructions to deliver them to Tej Bahadur on his attaining the age of discretion.

Guru Har Kishan did not name his successor. When his dying words "Baba Bakala" were known, no less than twenty-two Sikhs of Bakala wrongly declared themselves the occupants of the spiritual throne. Each pilgrim was required to make his offerings to all of them. Tej Bahadur, disgusted with their behaviour, shut himself in his house. However, an incident occurred which decided the dispute for ever. One Makhan Shah had a ship full of merchandise. It was about to sink in the ocean. Makhan Shah offered to pay 500 gold Mohars to the Guru if the calamity was averted. The ship was saved. Makhan Shah came to pay his offerings to the Guru, but instead of one Guru, he found a multitude of Gurus. He, therefore, proposed to offer two gold Mohars to each of them. He thought that one who was the real Guru would ask the whole amount. None of them could stand the test. Makhan Shah enquired whether there was anyone else who had advanced his claim to the office of Guru. The name of Tej Bahadur was mentioned as an unworthy member of the Guru's family. Makhan Shah found him concealed in a house and placed two gold

Mohars before him. Tej Bahadur then said, "Have you come to test me with these two Mohars? Bring in 500 Mohars according to your promise and then take them away as if they were from me. I am not in want of money". Then the Guru explained how the sinking ship was saved. Makhan Shah was struck with wonder. He had found out the true Guru. He at once proclaimed that the true Guru was found.

The collectors (Masands) and others at once assembled together. The coconut and the five pies which were lying in safe custody with Bhai Gurditta since the death of Guru Har Kishan were laid before Tej Bahadur. Tej Bahadur was installed in the office of Guru in 1664 A.D.

Dhermal was jealous of Tej Bahadur's succession. One of his followers went with twelve servants to kill the new Guru. The assassin fired and wounded Tej Bahadur, but not mortally.

Tej Bahadur was of a contented and peaceful disposition. He built a fort at Khartarpur and established his court there. He went on a tour to all parts of Hindustan—Prayag, Kashi, Patna, Gaya, etc. He founded a college at Patna for the instruction of the Sikhs.

Ram Rai, the disappointed son of Har Rai, informed the Emperor Aurangazeb that the Guru's designs were detrimental to the State and suggested that immediate steps should be taken to curb the Guru. Tej Bahadur was brought to Delhi. He stayed with the Rajput Chief, Raja Ram Singh of Amber. Ram Singh pleaded on behalf of the Guru and assured Aurangazeb that Tej Bahadur was a peaceful Guru and aspired to no political power.

Tej Bahadur went to Kamrup, Assam, along with Raja Ram Singh. Raja Ram Singh asked for the Guru's help in conquering Kamrup. The Guru did help him.

When the Guru was living at Patna, his wife Gujari gave birth to a son, the renowned Govind Singh. A light was seen in the heavens by a pious Fakir and his disciples on the occasion of the birth of the child. The Fakir knew that someone who would at once be a saint and a hero was born in the world. He then followed the direction of the light till he arrived at the child's residence at Patna.

Govind Rai (Guru Govind Singh) showed signs of martial ardour even from his earliest years. He used to shoot with a pellet-bow and organized a company of boys of his own age to practise with him.

After a long residence at Patna, Tej Bahadur returned to Punjab and settled at Anandpur on the banks of the Sutlej.

The Emperor Aurangazeb gave orders for the conversion of the Hindus of Kashmir. The Kashmiris sent a deputation to Guru Tej Bahadur. The Guru heard them sadly, and was thinking on what course he should follow. His little child, Govind Rai, enquired why he looked so sad. The Guru replied, "The world is grieved by persecution. He who is willing to sacrifice his life shall free the earth from the burden of her tormentors". The child said that his father was the only man to do this. The Guru was inspired by the words of his child. He told the Kashmiris to tell the Emperor that they would accept Islam if the Guru accepted it first. The Emperor immediately sent for Tej Bahadur.

Tej Bahadur obeyed the Emperor's order and came to Agra. From there he was taken to Delhi by the Kotwal. He firmly refused to be converted. He was put in jail. Once he happened to come to the top storey of the prison and was seen to look towards the private chambers of the queen. Having come to know this, the Emperor charged him with offensive behaviour. The Guru replied that though he was on the top storey of the prison, he never was looking at the private quarters; but he was looking towards the men of Europe who were approaching this land to destroy the Moghul empire.

Meanwhile, three of the Sikhs who were imprisoned along with the Guru escaped from the prison. The jailor locked the Guru in an iron cage and tortured him mercilessly. When the Guru was about to die, he wrote to his son Govind Rai, "My strength is done; I am in shackles and have no way out. Nanak said, 'God is my refuge' ". The Guru sent his son five pies and a coconut as a sign of his succession to the throne.

The Guru was adamant in his determination. No amount of torture could affect him. The Emperor threatened to execute the Guru, unless he embraced Islam or showed any miracle to prove his sainthood. The Guru boldly declined to do so. The Emperor at once ordered his execution. The Guru was executed in public. The head fell into the lap of a faithful disciple. A storm of dust arose, and under cover of it, the Sikh ran with the head as fast as he could to Anandpur. The head was cremated at Anandpur. Five Sikhs took the saint's body in a cart and secretly burnt it inside their house. The house caught fire and hid their act. They collected the bones and buried them. Govind Rai was duly proclaimed as the tenth Guru. He was the last Guru. In praise of his father he composed the following lines:

"Having broken his potsherd on the head of the
King of Delhi, he departed to paradise.
No one else who has come into this world has
acted like Tej Bahadur.
There was weeping for him in the whole world,
but there was rejoicing in paradise."

Guru Tej Bahadur had prepared the way for the great Guru Govind Singh. Tej Bahadur was acknowledged by the Sikhs as the *Saccha Badshah* who guided the soul to its final emancipation. The violent end of Tej Bahadur made a strong impression on the mind of Govind Singh. He resolved to take vengeance on the Mohammedans and to build a religious and military commonwealth of his own community. He truly accomplished his desired objects.

Tej Bahadur reigned as Guru for eleven years. He was slain at the age of fifty-four.

GURU GOVIND SINGH

Introduction

Guru Nanak founded Sikhism. Guru Angad, Guru Amardas, Guru Ramdas, Guru Arjun Dev, Guru Har Govind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Har Kishan, Guru Tej Bahadur and Guru Govind Singh were the successors to Guru Nanak.

Guru Angad organised the Sikhs as a sect. He organized and maintained a Langar (public kitchen) on a very extensive scale. It was open to all creeds and classes. He made it a rule that whoever came to see him must dine in his Langar or free kitchen and thus disregard caste restrictions. Brahmins, Khatris (Kshatriyas), Vaishyas and Sudras took food in the same Pangat (line) with no distinction whatever.

Ramdas, the fourth Guru, felt the need for a central place for the Sikhs to assemble from time to time. He restored at Ramdaspur an old tank which he named as "Amritsar" or the tank of nectar or immortality. In its centre he built a magnificent golden temple. He changed the name of the town from Ramdaspur to Amritsar, after the name of the tank. The Golden Temple became the headquarters of the Sikhs. Now a distinct community of Sikhs was formed.

Guru Arjun, the fifth Guru and the son of Guru Ramdas, compiled the sacred book of the Sikhs, the *Granth Sahib*—the Bible and the Gita of the Sikhs—and installed it in the Golden Temple at Amritsar. He played the most prominent part in disseminating the faith of the Sikh Gurus. He organized the Sikhs into a community.

Guru Arjun became inimical to Jahangir. He was charged with sedition and was tortured to death in 1606 A.D.

Guru Arjun installed his son Har Govind on the *Gaddi*. Har Govind, the sixth Guru, was put in jail for twelve years by Jahangir. Har Rai became the seventh Guru. Har Kishan, the eighth Guru, died when he was young.

Birth of Guru Govind

Tej Bahadur became the ninth Guru. He was the son of Guru Har Rai. He founded a new city named Anandpur. Guru Govind Singh was the only son of Tej Bahadur. He was born at Patna in 1666 A.D.

When he was a mere child, Govind Rai used to play the commander. His playmates acted as soldiers. Govind's toys were imitation bows, arrows and other arms. His favourite games were sham fights, military exercises, etc. He organized regular troops of boys. The boys took Govind Rai as their leader. He divided the boys into two contesting parties to test their strength, endurance and skill.

Guru Govind's qualities

Guru Govind Singh was a warrior-saint. He was endowed with Saurya (prowess, valour) and Dhairya (courage). He flooded the Punjab with heroic impulses. He instilled the military spirit in the Sikhs. His words that sounded like the booming of cannons and the clashing of steel infused a martial spirit in man. The weak-hearted became heroes when they were in the presence of this great hero of Punjab. Guru Govind was a wonderful saintly general. In his words you could feel the breath of the Goddess of Power or Mother Sakti. Guru Govind Singh laid the solid foundation of the Khalsa brotherhood. He taught people to sacrifice their lives and die in service with a smile on their lips.

Guru Govind Singh was a towering personality. He was a superman. He made small men really great. He made others like himself. Weakness was transmuted into invulnerable strength in his mighty presence. His flashing sword instilled terror in the minds of the unjust and unrighteous. Guru Govind was a passionate lover of death. He knew that the inner soul was immortal.

Guru Govind Singh's disciples were saints who lived in God while fighting. They were not in need of sitting poses like Padmasan or Siddhasan for meditation on the Divine, but they were in Samadhi when fighting for the oppressed and the helpless.

Guru Govind Singh was not only a patriot, but also a poet, philosopher and prophet.

At an early age Govind began to show signs of a lofty spirit and sublime aims. When less than nine years old, he suggested to his father to sacrifice his head for the sake of truth and righteousness. The Pundits of Kashmir approached Tej Bahadur for advice and help. They said to him that their religion must be saved at any cost.

The Pundits were asked by the Viceroy of Aurangazeb to choose between Islam and death. Guru Tej Bahadur thought that if a pure and holy person sacrificed his life, Hinduism might be saved and the bigoted Emperor might come to his senses soon. He thought that there were holier men than he. He was sad. His face expressed anxiety. His little son enquired of his father the cause of his sadness and anxiety. The young boy solved the problem saying, "Beloved father! Who is greater and holier than yourself in this land?". The soothing and wise answer given by the son made Tej Bahadur's decision firm.

Govind Rai was installed in the office of Guru when he was nine years old. When the question of Jenen or the Brahminical thread was referred to him, he said that the sword was to serve him as the sacred thread and that his mission was to punish and exterminate the oppressors.

Guru Govind Singh was a great scholar in Gurmukhi, Sanskrit and Persian. He patronized poets and cultured men. He engaged many poets to render into Hindi poetry the inspiring stories of Lord Rama, Lord Krishna and Arjuna. He himself wrote Hindi poetry which remains unsurpassed even to this day.

Guru Govind Singh fought with a tiger and killed it with a sword.

Guru Govind's marriage

Govind Rai had three wives—Jito, Sundri and Sahit Devi. He had four sons. The eldest Ajit Singh was born through Sundri. Three sons were born to Jito. They were Zarawar Singh, Jughar Singh and Fatih Singh. Sahit Devi asked for issue. Guru Govind Singh said that the whole Khalsa nation would be her children. Therefore she was called the Mother of the Khalsa.

Presents to the Guru

Duni Chand of Kabul, a Sikh, presented to the Guru a magnificent tent on which beautiful scenes were embroidered in gold and silver. Raja Rattan Rai of Assam came on a pilgrimage to Anandpur to pay his respects to his Guru. He presented five horses, a wonderful weapon, a Panchkalla or a combination of five arms (viz., club, lance, sword, dagger and pistol) and a wonderful elephant, with a whitish streak from his forehead to the tail, called *Parsadi* which was well instructed in serving his master in a variety of ways. The elephant waved a fan or Chauri over the Guru, kept a jug of water in its trunk when the feet of Guru Govind Singh were being washed, wiped his feet with a towel, laced his shoes in order and brought back the arrows shot by him. Raja Rattan Rai also presented a precious throne from which puppets came out and played on pressing a spring.

Fight with Bhimchand

Guru Govind Singh increased the number of his troops. He built a fortress on the bank of the Yamuna river and named it Paunta.

The glory of the Guru increased. He made his followers saint-soldiers. He introduced a new form of drill. A new war-drum was introduced. Every day new recruits were enlisted in the Guru's army. Numerous presents of arms and horses began to pour in. Brave and courageous combatants who were in any way oppressed by the Emperor Aurangazeb began to flock round Guru Govind Singh. They were equipped and drilled in military discipline.

The hill chiefs observed the prosperity and progress of the Guru. Raja Bhimchand of Bilaspur, in whose territory the Guru was then residing, became jealous. He made many treacherous attempts to get possession of the elephant called *Parsadi.*

All the efforts of the Raja proved futile. The Raja sent a message to the Guru to send the elephant to him, in default of which the latter was liable to expulsion from his territory. The

Raja objected to the beating of the Guru's war-drum. He took it as a challenge to his authority. The Guru said to the Raja, "Nobody can command me except the one Creator who is immortal. I do not live in your territory. I live in a city which my father purchased with gold. I cannot give *Parsadi* to you. I am always ready to wage war with you. I am not afraid of your threat of war". This enraged the Raja. Raja Bhimchand attacked the Guru in 1682 A.D., but was defeated. Many of the Raja's soldiers died in the battlefield.

Battle of Bhangani

On another occasion, the hill chiefs attacked the forces of the Guru. Bhimchand was the chief among them. A fierce battle was fought at Bhangani. Many died on both sides. The chiefs fled. The Guru's army got victory.

Battle of Cham Kaur

Aurangazeb ordered Wazir Khan, the Governor of Sirhind, to besiege Anandpur and bring the Guru to his court. Many of the Sikhs deserted the Guru. The Guru fought with the imperial forces with the aid of the few faithful left with him.

At Cham Kaur, there was a fierce battle. The Guru's two elder sons Sahib Ajit Singh and Sahib Zarawar Singh thrilled the enemy and embraced death. His last two sons, with their grandmother, escaped.

Ganga Ram, an old Brahmin cook of the Guru, took the two sons Jughar Singh and Fatih Singh, aged eight and six respectively, and the Guru's mother to his own house after the Sarsa river disaster. Finding an opportunity, he stole the money and the jewels which they had in the room with them. The Guru's mother reproached Ganga Ram for his misbehaviour. Then the traitor turned them out of his house. He pre-arranged with the police authorities for their arrest. They were taken to Wazir Khan, the Governor of Sirhind, who asked them to embrace Islam. The boys declined to embrace Islam. They were buried alive between the stone walls of Sirhind.

The Guru remained unmoved when he heard this sad news. He said, "It is Sirhind that shall perish and not my sons".

Battle of Mukatsar

At Mukatsar, the Guru had fierce battle with the forces of the Emperor who came to capture him. The deserters repented and joined the Guru again. The Guru became victorious. Aurangazeb asked the Guru for a personal meeting and gave him assurances. The Guru wrote an epistle *Zafarnama* to Aurangazeb. He accused him of treachery and double-dealing and said that he would not believe in his professions of religion. The letter touched the heart of the Emperor. Soon after he died in 1707.

Birth of the Khalsa

Guru Govind Singh said in an assembly: "I want the heads of five Sikhs". The whole assembly was struck with wonder. Bhai Daya Ram, a Khatri Sikh of Lahore, came forward and said, "O Guru! I offer my head to Thee, O True Lord!". The Guru took him inside a big Shamiana (tent). The blow of a sword was heard and streams of blood came gushing out of the tent. Thereupon, the Guru came out and took his seat with the blood-stained sword in hand. He then cried out for another victim. Then Dhanna, a Jat, came forward and offered his head. He too was taken inside and dealt with like Daya Ram. Then Himnah, a water-carrier, came forward and offered his head. Afterwards Sahib Ram, a barber, and Mohkam Chand, a cloth printer, came forward and offered their heads.

Then the Guru came out with five persons equipped like himself. Only five goats, which were concealed inside, were killed. Guru Govind Singh then explained the true principles of life to the selected five persons. The chosen five were arrayed in white clothes with short breeches, sword in hand. They stood before the Guru, repeating the Name of the Lord: "*Vahe Guru*". The Guru then took some fresh river water in an iron basin. He put some Batashas (hollow lumps of sugar) in it, stirred the mixture with a double-edged sword, repeating certain hymns in deep meditation and declared that he had prepared the *Amrit*—nectar or water of life. He sprinkled it on the five men around him and gave it to each of them to drink. He proclaimed them as the *Khalsa*, the pure, and commanded them to add to their names the epithet of 'Singh', the Lion. Those were the first initiated disciples.

Those chosen five were called as "The Five Piaras" or "The Five Beloved". They enjoyed the foremost place among the Khalsa and served as the Guru's apostles for the propagation of righteousness.

Amrita or Baptism of the Khalsa

The mere keeping of long hair does not make one a Khalsa. A Khalsa must be initiated with *Amrita* (nectar) in order to infuse both moral and spiritual strength in him.

The initiate girds himself with a sword. He stands in front of the Holy Scripture and repeats the Name of "*Vahe Guru*" all the time. He should have long hair (*Kesh*), short breeches (*Kachha*), a comb (*Kangah*), an iron bracelet (*Kara*) and a double-edged sword (*Kirpan*).

Fresh water from the river is brought. The iron basin should be scrupulously clean. Batashas are put in the basin. The basin is filled with water. The Batashas are rubbed by the double-edged sword with repetition of *Vahe Guru*. Hymns such as *Japji* are recited. The members who prepare the *Amrita* must be orthodox Singhs, of pure life. They are five in number.

Five handfuls of *Amrita* are sprinkled over the eyes and face. Five handfuls are poured into the hair of the head of the initiate. After the initiation ceremony is over, the initiate is made to understand himself to have been reborn, with Guru Govind Singh as his spiritual father and Mata Shib Kaur as his spiritual mother.

The initiate enters into a new life, a new birth. The initiates are given Karah Parshad (Halwa made of flour, Ghee and sugar).

Guru Govind's last days

The Guru stayed at Talwandi Sahib for nine months and made it a seat of learning and gave to it the name of "Guru's

Kashi". Here was reproduced orally *Adi Granth Sahib* and verses of Guru Tej Bahadur were added to it.

Guru Govind Singh travelled to the South and established himself at Nanded in the Nizam's State. He made Nanded another Anandpur.

At Nanded the Guru was one day stabbed by an Afghan when he was alone and asleep in his tent. He at once rose and killed the Afghan with his sword. The Guru himself died after a few days in 1708 A.D. in the forty-second year of his life.

The Guru's last words were: "I entrust my Khalsa to the bosom of the everlasting Divine. The spiritual guide for you all will be the holy scripture, the *Granth Sahib.* Under the permission of the Immortal Being, the Khalsa Panth was started. All the Sikhs are enjoined to recognize the Granth as their Guru".

Saints of Recent Times

RAGHAVENDRA SWAMI

India has produced great Mahatmas in no small number. Their biographies are often being written and rewritten by many. But what for? The sacred lives and teachings of such great men are not mere stories for filling up the pages in newspapers, but they are irresistible appeals for keeping alive the ideals they preached. Their physical sufferings and marvellous achievements have a miraculous effect in influencing the minds of men to move in the path of Dharma.

One such great Mahatma was Raghavendra Tirtha Swami of the 17th century, whose memorable day of disappearance from this mundane world is celebrated in Sravana Krishna Dvitiya every year.

Search for a Guru

Venkata Bhatta, later known as Raghavendra Tirtha, was the last son of Thimmanna Bhatta of Bhuvanagiri village in South India. He was under the care of his elder brother. His Upanayanam was performed in his seventh year and he was sent to Madurai for preliminary studies in Sanskrit. He was extraordinarily quick in mastering the subjects, became well-versed in them and gained a good command of languages. His life up to this point of time was not marked by anything remarkable or worth mentioning.

In his search for an enlightened Guru for the higher studies in Vedanta, Venkata Bhatta approached the celebrated saint Sudhindra Tirtha of Kumbakonam whose increasing reputation in those days attracted one and all. Venkata Bhatta surrendered himself at the feet of his Guru who gladly welcomed him. The ideal Guru, often taking note of the extraordinary qualities and capacity in Venkata Bhatta, praised the Lord for having blessed him with such a rare disciple, who, the Guru thought, would one day become a great Acharya Purusha.

One midnight the Guru secretly inspected the retiring hall of his disciples to find out the truth in the charges levelled by some of them against his pet Venkata Bhatta, that he always wasted his time, never studied the texts and so on. There he found his disciples comfortably in slumber on a variety of luxurious beds and pillows. There was no lamp, no book or any of the other things which might indicate that they had been studying in the night. To his surprise, however, the Guru found that Venkata Bhatta was missing in that group. He hurried anxiously in search of his pet student. The great and aged Swamiji's heart almost melted with pity for his young student when he noticed him lying in a corner. His bed was the Mother Earth, his pillow was his own hand, and he had no covering to protect himself from the cold wind. By the side of him there was a huge heap of dry leaves which he had burnt r light to study and a copy of *Nyaya Sudha* with a bundle of myrah writing leaves.

His commentary on "Nyaya Sudha"

The soft-hearted Guru could no longer bear the sight of a heart-rending spectacle. The extreme humility of the ng genius moved the Guru very much. As it was too chill, the Guru took off his Kashayam and with that he covered the body of the sleeping boy and retired to his own quarters taking the palmyrah leaves with him. He was curious to know what was written in them and when he looked into them, he was wonderstruck to find that it was a beautiful commentary on *Nyaya Sudha*. His eyes shed tears of joy out of emotion and his heart proved helpless to arrest its overflow.

Nyaya Sudha is a great scholarly work of a very high order on Dvaita Vedanta composed by the illustrious saint Jaya Tirtha Swami of the 14th century. It is too hard a nut to crack even for intellectual giants and absolutely unthinkable for the young students. Hence it is no exaggeration that the Guru's rejoicings went out of bounds when he saw his young disciple's independent commentary on the very work which the student was yet learning under him. To show his appreciation, the Guru convened a large congregation, introduced the young author to the public and named his distinguished work *Sudha Parimala*.

Call to Sannyasa

The call to take Sannyasa came to Venkata Bhatta from his Guru Sudhindra. As he declined in the first instance, Goddess Sarasvati, it is said, appeared in his dream and blessed him with Vairagya Jnana which made him finally accept the great call. He received the initiation from his Guru who blessed him with the name Raghavendra Tirtha. Thus Venkata Bhatta entered the highest order in 1623 A.D. at Thanjavur. He realised the ideal of his mission and spent his life in sacred service to the Lord and for the benefit of humanity. Preaching the power of pure Sakti was the paramount purpose of his birth. For this purpose, Raghavendra forgot all his bodily comforts and conveniences. He visited many places in the country and performed many wonders.

Averting a famine

Once in the kingdom of Thanjavur, a precarious famine was threatened and the state granary was almost empty. The king tried all possible means to save his subjects, but in vain. He heard the fame of Raghavendra, and as a last resort, he ran to him, prostrated at his feet and begged if he could help to drive away the famine. The Swami readily proceeded to the king's capital, and at the State Granary, wrote the Bijakshara "*Sri*" in Sanskrit, with his own hand. He stayed in the State for some days writing this daily and also performed Japa. Within a short time, there was a heavy downpour of rain, averting the famine and producing a bumper harvest.

His great works

Raghavendra's scholarly contributions to Indian philosophy in general, and to Dvaita Vedanta in particular, are admired even to this day with universal applause. Raghavendra wrote forty-six works of an illustrious nature in language which was so impressive and telling as to dispel the doubts and illusions from the minds of many. On the Upanishads, he has written beautiful Khandarthas. His enlightening Tippanies or commentaries on various works are equally famous.

Bhakti combined with Jnana was the central theme of Raghavendra's teachings. In the *Raghavendra Stotra*, the

Swami has been referred to as *Sarva Tantra Svatantra* by one of the great men of his time.

Merges in God

After adorning the pontifical throne for forty-seven years, Raghavendra went to the Bellary district. On the bank of the river Tungabhadra he asked his disciples to build a *Brindavana* or tomb. On a day in 1671 A.D., this great Mahatma came round that *Brindavana* singing a melodious song in praise of Lord Krishna and entered into it in flesh and blood in the presence of thousands of men and women with their eyes filled with tears and their hearts heavy with grief. The *Brindavana* is situated in Mantralaya, nearly nine miles from the Tungabhadra station on the Madras-Bombay rail route. Before entering into the *Brindavana*, Raghavendra Swami told the people that he would live in the *Brindavana* for seven hundred years and would give relief to those who approached him for blessings.

Proof of eternity

Even to this day Raghavendra Swami is worshipped by his devotees as almost a Kula Daiva. Men of different schools of thought daily flock to sacred Mantralaya. They do Seva to the Swamigal's *Brindavana* and return to their homes with great joy and immense relief. Is this not enough to prove that Raghavendra Swami is still alive?

If, in spite of all these facts, the modern critic is still tempted to indulge in an ironic smile over the belief, he has only to refer to a notification in the Madras District Gazetteer, Volume I, Chapter XV, Bellary District, Adoni Taluk, page 213, reprinted in 1916. The notification says that Raghavendra emanated from the tomb and conversed with a foreigner, Sir Thomas Munro, who was then the Chief Collector of the region. This incident is stated to have taken place in 1900 A.D. when the Chief Collector was personally inspecting the locality of the *Brindavana* in connection with the case to resume the endowments granted to the *Brindavana*. After his experience, Sir Thomas Munro is said to have quashed the proposal not to resume the endowments.

RAMALINGA SWAMI

Ramalinga Swami was born in the village of Marudur, near Chidambaram in Southern India, on 5th October, 1823 (Meena Lagna, Chitra Nakshatra, Tula Rasi). He lived for fifty-four years. He was born of Ramaiah Pillai and Chinnammai. Ramaiah Pillai was a village revenue officer and teacher. He was a sincere devotee of Lord Siva. He was pious and virtuous. Chinnammai was a chaste woman who was endowed with many virtuous qualities.

Siva Yogi, a great Mahatma, came to the house of Chinnammai and asked her, "O lady! I am very hungry. Give me some food". Chinnammai thought that Lord Nataraja Himself had come in that form. She treated the sage with great respect and served him food. The sage was immensely pleased and said, "O lady! Thou shalt be blessed with a divine child like me". He gave her some holy ash and left the house in joy. Chinnammai swallowed the holy ash with intense devotion. She conceived and brought forth the divine child Ramalingam.

Ramaiah Pillai expired when Ramalingam was only six months old. Sabhapathi, the eldest son, performed the funeral rites. He moved his family to Madras. He became a teacher there. He took great care of his brother Ramalingam and himself gave him education in Tamil. Ramalingam repeated, even untaught, many poems when he was only five years old. He was born wise. He had a wonderful memory. He was a prodigy. He had profound knowledge in Saiva Siddhanta literature and Vedanta.

Ramalingam was very kind, charitable, simple, humble, truthful, pure, merciful and peaceful. He always spoke sweet and kind words. He was very polite and modest. He ate very little. He had perfect self-restraint. He never talked in vain. His heart was filled with devotion. He did Upasana of Lord Subrahmanya with intense fervour. When he was nine years old, he composed poems in Tamil in praise of Lord Subrahmanya, such as the one below:

"O Ocean of Mercy, O Lord with six heads,
O Joy of Dheivanai,
O King with Vel in hand, O Light of lights,
O Flood of Bliss!
O Lord of lords, who came to me as my
all-merciful Guru and saved me,
O Lord with twelve lotus eyes,
Ocean of Knowledge, my Mother,
the Apple of my eyes,
O Lord who gives Darshan on the vehicle of
peacock to His devotees, Thou hast saved me."

Ramalingam, when he was sixteen years old, used to visit the temple at Thiruvottiyur near Madras and worship the Lord Thyagaraja there. He had Darshan of the Lord. The Lord Himself initiated Ramalingam into the mysteries of Atmic knowledge. When Ramalingam was very hungry one night, the Lord Himself took the form of the priest of the temple and fed him with his own hands. Ramalingam kept the "father and son" relationship (Pitha-Puthra-Bhava) with the Lord.

Ramalingam did not wish to marry, but his brother Sabhapathi forced him to marry. Ramalingam married, but had no attachment to his wife. Thus he did not lead the actual married life. His mind was ever fixed in meditation.

Many devotees approached Ramalingam for getting spiritual instructions. Ramalingam instructed them and led them in the spiritual path and taught them the secrets of Vedanta and Siddhanta.

Once, one of the rich disciples invited Ramalingam to attend his daughter's marriage. Ramalingam sent a humorous reply: "O mind! You have neither shoes nor a valuable coat, neither good clothes nor money, neither good personality nor house. How then are you going to attend the marriage in a rich man's house?".

Ramalingam's mother died and Ramalingam performed the funeral rites. As his brother Parasurama Pillai was sick, Ramalingam took him to Chidambaram for Darshan of Lord Natáraja. Then he went on a pilgrimage to Sirgazhi, Thiruvarur, Thirupugalur, Thiruchengattangudi and other places. Wherever he went, he composed poems in praise of Lord Siva and sang them in divine ecstasy, with profuse tears in his eyes.

Ramalingam met the leader of the Brahmo Samaj in Thirupapuliyur, a sacred place of pilgrimage which is thirteen miles from Pondicherry. There was a heated discussion between them on Upasana or worship. The leader of the Brahmo Samaj said, "Brahman is formless. He should be worshipped mentally. There is no use in the worship of idols". Ramalingam replied, "When the Virat aspect of Brahman is described in the Vedas, Brahman has form. For neophytes, it is difficult to do worship mentally. Worship of the personal God in images leads to God-realisation. The devotee superimposes Isvara and His attributes on the idol. The idol remains an idol, but the devotion goes to God. The all-pervading Brahman is in the idol also. The support for the idol is Brahman. Beginners cannot concentrate on the formless Brahman. The mind wants a support to lean upon. An image is very necessary for beginners for the purpose of concentration. The same Vedas which speak of image-worship for beginners speak of Ahamgraha Upasana or meditation on the Self or on the significance of the Mahavakyas such as *Tat Tvam Asi*". The leader of the Brahmo Samaj had to close his mouth when he heard this answer from Ramalingam.

Afterwards Ramalingam came back to Chidambaram and thence proceeded to Karunkuzhi near Marudur, his birthplace, where his sick brother Parasurama Pillai expired. Ramalingam performed his funeral rites. He performed a miracle here. He burnt a lamp with water.

Ramalingam then went to Cuddalore and Manjakuppam and later on settled at Karunkuzhi. Many learned Sannyasins and Tamil Pundits approached Ramalingam for discussions and for getting their doubts cleared. Ramalingam gave them suitable replies.

One day Ramalingam was deeply meditating in his cottage at Mettukuppam. He had the divine vision of the Divine Light. He gives a description of his intuitive experiences: "O Light of lights! O Self-radiance, the dispeller of the darkness of ignorance, I am fully illumined now. All my doubts and delusions have vanished in toto. I am one with the Divine. I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute. I enjoy supreme bliss. How can I describe it! I have attained immortality. I behold the one all-pervading Self only everywhere. All dualities, distinctions and differences have disappeared. My joy is boundless. I have attained THAT which is beyond the reach of the senses and the intellect. I am birthless, deathless, decayless and changeless. I am beyond time, space and causation".

Ramalingam entreated the Lord thus: "O Lord Nataraja! My father, mother, preceptor, my all! I have taken refuge at Thy lotus feet. I do perfect and total surrender unto Thee. Save me. Protect me. I want neither riches nor the enjoyment of the world. I have annihilated all mundane desires. My eyes long for Thy magnanimous vision only. My heart melts for union with Thee. Thou hast lifted me to the lofty heights of spiritual splendour. Let me dwell in Thee for ever. I am Thy child. Thou art my all-merciful father. Embrace me. Let me be blessed with Thy grace for ever. Play with me. Dance with me. Make me drink the nectar of immortality. I firmly take hold of Thy feet. I cannot leave Thee. Bless me". Ramalingam wept day and night and shed torrents of tears. His bed was drenched with tears of love.

Ramalingam spoke of the divine call thus: "When I was pining for the Darshan of the Lord, when I was in the height of divine ecstasy, when my heart was melting with profound love for the Lord, the Lord came to me and said, 'My child, you are dear to Me. I have enthroned Myself in your heart. I have given you full illumination and special Siddhis. Preach the gospel of LOVE everywhere. Serve humanity. Make the people lead the divine life. Make them happy'".

Ramalingam said to the people: "O men! Tread the path of Truth. Lead a pure divine life. Trust not this world and the senses. Walk in the spiritual path boldly and cheerfully. Come with me. Enjoy the bliss of the Eternal. Dance and play with my Lord Nataraja. Enjoy the Jnana Lila. Attain the divine life which alone can give you immortality.

"Rise above this miserable sensual life. It is not life at all. It is veritable death. Those who do not think of the Lord, who simply waste their lives in sensual pleasures, are vermins only. Those persons who, in spite of their knowledge of the non-existence of happiness both in the past and in the present, in the baneful objects of the world, do get themselves entangled in them with their thoughts clinging to them, deserve the appellation of 'the worst ass'. Sensual people lose the power of discrimination and right understanding and repeat shamefully the same ignoble, sensual act. What a wretched state!

"March boldly into the illimitable domain of Satchidananda. The Light is within you. Meditate on the Lord who is an embodiment of light, peace, bliss and knowledge. Do not waste the precious life in idle-gossiping, scandal-mongering, backbiting, eating, drinking and sleeping. Life is meant for a higher purpose. Come, corne, attain immortality".

Arulpa is a voluminous book which contains the songs of Ramalinga Swami. It contains the essence of the Vedas and the Upanishads. It is a universal Bible or Gita. They are songs of revelation. Ramalinga Swami poured forth these songs from the bottom of his heart when he was in the height of divine ecstasy. They are filled with nectar. They reveal the direct intuitive experiences of the seer of the spiritual light. All the inspired poems or songs of Ramalinga Swami are sweet and melodious, heart-melting and soul-stirring. They are characterized by depth of thought and clearness of exposition. They instil devotion in the hearts of the hearers and the readers. They are very pleasing to the mind.

Ramalingam has not ignored the physical aspect of life. He has given in his book rules for attaining a healthy and long life, instructions on diet, sleep, etc., and a list of herbs and medicines for curing diseases.

Ramalinga Swami did some solid constructive work at Vadalur, near Karunkuzhi. He started a *Samarasa Veda Sanmarga Sangha* for the dissemination of spiritual knowledge. *Satya Dharmashala,* a charity house, was opened to feed the Sadhus and the poor without any caste difference. Ten thousand people were fed daily for three days. A school called

Samarasa Veda Pathashala was opened to teach the students *Arulpa*.

Ramalingam taught his disciples hygiene and the laws of health. He taught them how to keep the body strong, healthy and young. The *Satya Gyana Sabha* or *True Knowledge Society* was established to preach the precepts of Siddhanta, Vedanta, Yoga, etc. A magnificent temple for common worship was also built. It was open to all.

Ramalingam conducted discourses and lectures regularly in the *Gyana Sabha* hall. He worked day and night for the spiritual uplift of humanity. He made vigorous preaching against drinking and flesh eating. He made his disciples do the correct spiritual practices and deep meditation to get the divine light.

Ramalinga Swami had superhuman powers. He had many Siddhis. His words and speeches produced an electric thrill in the hearers. He had a magnetic personality. He exercised a tremendous influence over people. He came to awaken the world to God-consciousness. He brought to the people the message of peace, love, eternal life and freedom. He transformed the hearts of thousands by his spiritual power.

On the eve of his retirement from the world, Ramalinga Swami addressed his disciples and admirers: "My beloved children, I wish to be away from you for some time. You cannot get this body either for burial or for burning. I want to enter *Sadananda Nirvikalpa Samadhi* (all-blissful state of superconsciousness). My body will disappear. You will not be able to see it. I will roam about as a Siddha. Now close all the windows and doors and lock the doors. If anybody opens out of curiosity, there shall be only void".

The doors were locked. All people were watching the house day and night. Some people opened the door out of curiosity. There was nothing inside; there was only void. Ramalinga Swami had disappeared mysteriously. A Yogi or a Siddha can do anything.

Thus the sage, seer and poet of Marudur, the Yogi, Siddha and Prophet of Vadalur, the beloved child of Lord Nataraja of Chidambaram, disappeared. But he did not disappear, for he still lives in our hearts. His teachings inspire us. His life is a beacon-light to guide us in the path of salvation.

The following are some of the important teachings of Ramalingam:

1. Do not have a cruel look. Do not hanker after tasty foods. Speak kind and sweet words. Do not utter lies. Prevent people from killing. Have Satsang of Mahatmas. Eat moderately. Take care of your health. Observe celibacy. Wear always Kaupin (Langote).
2. Fix the mind on the Lord. Concentrate on the Trikuti (the space between the two eye-brows). Get rid of Raga-Dvesha (likes and dislikes, attraction and repulsion). Do not allow the mind to indulge in sensual thoughts. Control the senses. Do not allow them to run in the wrong direction. Do not praise yourself. Kill egoism and pride. Do not think too much of yourself. Do not expect honour and respect from others.
3. Have equal vision. Treat everybody with respect. Give up the idea of male and female, high and low, and all sorts of distinctions. Cultivate fellow-feeling and universal brotherhood.
4. Feel that the whole world is your own Self. Feel that all beings are your own Self.
5. Develop universal love. Live in God. Be kind to all. Take refuge in the Lord. Meditate and realise. Allow the divine light to descend.

SWAMI DAYANANDA SARASWATI

Mool Sankar was the name of Swami Dayananda before he became a Sannyasin. He was born in 1824 at Morvi, the capital of a very small state in Gujarat, Kathiawar. Amba Sankar was his father. He was a rich Brahmin Zamindar and banker with an intense religious turn of mind.

When Mool Sankar was five years old, he was taught the Devanagari alphabet. He learnt by heart select Slokas from the sacred writings. He was invested with the sacred thread in his eighth year. The seed of spiritual awakening was first sown in his mind on the night of Sivaratri in his fourteenth year.

Mool Sankar had a terrible shock when his sister and uncle died. It showed to him the transitory character of life and the vanity of human aspirations. Mool Sankar realised that life on this earth was only a fleeting show.

Mool Sankar wanted to go to Varanasi to study Sanskrit literature and the sacred Sanskrit books. But his father totally refused and sent him to a Pathashala in a neighbouring village.

The father of Mool Sankar arranged for his son's marriage. Mool Sankar ran away from his house. He did not want to get married. He felt that marriage was a great net and entanglement.

Mool Sankar reached a village named Sayala. Here he met a Brahmachari, the head of a religious sect. Mool Sankar requested the Brahmachari to admit him into the order of Naishthika Brahmacharya. Mool Sankar was given ochre robes and renamed as Suddha Chaitanya.

In the course of his wanderings, Mool Sankar came to the religious fair held at Siddhapur every year. There he met a Vairagi who was an acquaintance of his father. The Vairagi at once wrote to the father about the whereabouts of his son. Amba Sankar came at once to Siddhapur and met his son in a temple. He was very much enraged when he saw his son in the ochre robe. He tore away his son's cloth into pieces and broke his begging bowl. Mool Sankar was given new clothes and kept under the watch of a number of servants. The servant fell fast asleep at night. Mool Sankar ascended a big Peepal tree and kept himself concealed all night. Next morning, the father and the servants searched for Mool Sankar, but could not find him.. They returned home.

Mool Sankar went to Ahmedabad and Baroda. Afterwards he went to a place on the bank of the holy Narmada. Here he studied several books on Vedanta under one Sannyasin, Paramahamsa Paramananda. He had perfect faith in the identity of the individual soul with the Supreme Soul.

Mool Sankar was initiated into the order of Sannyasa by Swami Poornananda Saraswati. His name was changed to Swami Dayananda Saraswati. He was now only twenty-four years.

Swami Dayananda spent the next twelve years of his life in wanderings, pilgrimages, study, Tapas and practice of Yoga. He visited all the sacred places in Northern India. He developed strong endurance now on account of his wanderings. He starved and slept in the jungles.

At the age of thirty-six, Swami Dayananda proceeded to Mathura and met Swami Virajananda, a famous Sannyasin, a great scholar in Sanskrit, a Punjabi by birth, who was blind on account of an attack of small-pox. Swami Virajananda spent much of his time in meditation. He was very harsh and strict.

The connection of Swami Dayananda with Swami Virajananda decided Dayananda's career. The great work which Swami Dayananda did was due to the inspiring personality of Swami Virajananda. Swami Virajananda beat Dayananda several times.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati served his Guru diligently, fetched water for him from a great distance, swept his room and washed his clothes also. He lived with his Guru for two and a half years.

At last the parting day came. Dayananda, with a few cloves in his hand, approached his Guru and said, "My adorable Guru, I am a poor man and have nothing more to give". Swami Virajananda said, "I am anxious that you should part with something that you possess". Swami Dayananda replied, "All that is mine, my very life is at your service, O adorable Master". Virajananda said, "Make a proper use of the education you have acquired. Disseminate your knowledge everywhere. Remove darkness. The Hindus have forgotten what their true religion is. Teach them the true Vedic religion".

Dayananda bowed to his Guru with great reverence and took a vow that he would dedicate his life to the cause of the revival of the Vedic religion. He took leave of his Guru and at once started his work.

Swami Dayananda proceeded to Agra and delivered some lectures. Then he marched to Gwalior and Jaipur. The Maharaja of Jaipur welcomed the Swami with great reverence and enthusiasm.

Dayananda delivered lectures in Hardwar, Varanasi and Calcutta. He met Debendranath Tagore and Babu Keshab Chandra Sen. He delivered lectures in Sanskrit and in Hindi. He met with great opposition from the orthodox Pundits as he spoke against idol worship.

Swami Dayananda delivered lectures at Allahabad and Bombay. In Bombay he established the first Arya Samaj. Thereupon he went to Pune and delivered a series of lectures in the Hindu Club building. The Pundits condemned him and his teachings. He was even attacked, but his life was saved by the timely help of the police.

Thereupon Dayananda proceeded to Punjab. He achieved great success in Lahore. He established Samajas in almost every important town in Punjab. Then he went to Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan and did propaganda there. Maharaja Jaswant Singh of Jodhpur had then fallen into evil ways. He was under the influence of a common woman. Dayananda made the Maharaja leave the woman. She poisoned the Swami through his food. Dayananda thus passed away in Ajmer on the 30th October, 1883, on the night of Deepavali.

Swami Dayananda, as a logician, had no rival; and as a debater, he had no equal. His power of reasoning was marvellous. He was a great orator.

Swami Dayananda's *Satyarth Prakash* (exposition of the meaning of Truth) is a well-known book. It contains the teachings of Swami Dayananda.

The Arya Samaj has done great social service in India. Schools, colleges and orphanages have cropped up in several centres. The Kangri Gurukul and D.A.V. College, Dehra Dun are very good institutions. Swami Shraddhananda, a disciple of Swami Dayananda, developed the Kangri Gurukul. He started the Suddha movement which reclaimed those who became Christians and Muslims.

Swami Shraddhananda was a man of independent thinking. He had the courage to repudiate openly whatever appeared irrational to him. He had a dynamic personality. His deep spiritual yearning and intense thirst for Truth made him renounce all worldly interests and devote himself to the study of the Vedas and to systematic moral and spiritual self-discipline.

Swami Shraddhananda wrote a learned commentary on the Rig Veda. He was for a long time the leader of the Arya Samaj. His saintly character, dynamic personality, all-embracing heart, intense love for the society and the nation, and extraordinary power of organization, contributed greatly to the expansion of the activities of the Arya Samaj. Shraddhananda died a martyr's death in 1926 at the age of 71.

Teachings of Swami Dayananda

1. The source of all true knowledge is the supreme Being.
2. God is all-Truth and all-Beauty. He is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. He is formless, just, benevolent, unborn, endless, infinite, unchanging, beginningless, the support of all, undecaying, imperishable, fearless, eternal, the one designer and director of the entire universe. He alone must be adored.
3. The Veda is the scripture of true knowledge. It is the paramount duty of every Aryan to learn, teach, hear and preach the Veda.
4. Accept Truth and remove untruth.
5. Do your actions in accordance with Dharma after a thorough investigation of right and wrong.

6. The main object of the Arya Samaj is to do good to the world, to promote the physical, social and spiritual good of every being.
7. Your conduct towards all should be guided by love, righteousness and justice.
8. Destroy nescience and promote physical and spiritual service.
9. Look for your good in the good of all.
10. Abide by the laws of society which are best calculated to promote the well-being of all.

SUNDARESA SWAMI

From time to time, spiritual luminaries with tremendous powers and super-sensual knowledge are born in this world to establish and protect Dharma, to remove any sad catastrophe, to elevate people from the quagmire of Samsara and to disseminate the glory of Name, Bhakti, Knowledge of Self and the principles of Yoga. They are all direct rays or Amsas of the Lord. Sundaresa Swamigal was one such.

Sundaresa Swamigal was born in the reputed family of Appayya Dikshitar at Gangaikondan in the district of Tirunelveli in South India in 1831. His father's name was Yagneswara Sivan. Kamakshi was his mother's name. He studied the scriptures, the six Darshanas and the Prasthanatraya at Pattamadai. Even in his boyhood, Sundaresa was a prodigy and a great devotee of Lord Siva. He led a married life for some time and then took Vidvat Sannyasa at the age of twenty-three, when full Vairagya dawned on him. He was initiated into the mysteries of Kaivalya by his Guru Visweswara Shastri of Adaichani in Tirunelveli district. He practised rigorous meditation and attained Nirvikalpa Samadhi.

Sundaresa Swamigal then went on a pilgrimage to Madurai, Jambukeswaram, Thiruvaiyaru, Mayuram, Sirgazhi, Chidambaram, Viruddhachalam, Kalahasti, Kashi, Rameswaram and other places and disseminated spiritual knowledge wherever he went.

Sundaresa Swamigal was a Brahma-srotri and a Brahmanishtha. He was a Paramahamsa Sannyasin and an Ativarnashrami. He had a very large heart. He initiated even Sudras and women into the mysteries of Brahma Jnana or Kaivalya. He was a profound scholar in Sanskrit, a sage of infinite inner spiritual experience. He had many Siddhis. He disseminated Bhakti and Jnana far and wide. He conducted discourses on Suta Samhita wherever he went. He did Kumbhabhishekam of twenty-two temples. He worked hard for the well-being and solidarity of the world through Kathas, discourses, lectures and training of aspirants.

Sundaresa Swamigal had all the qualities of a perfect sage or Jivanmukta. Though he lived in the world, he was not of the world. He roamed about fearlessly and happily, without attachment and egoism, with balanced mind and equal vision. He had no distinction between high and low, censure and praise, honour and dishonour. He had the highest knowledge, perfection and supreme bliss.

What a great wonder! What meritorious actions Sundaresa Swamigal must have done in his previous birth! Through his Satsankalpa, he worked wonders. He was a god on earth. How peaceful he was! How dynamic he was! Adorations to Sundaresa Swamigal! Wherever he went, he influenced people. He was a powerful magnet. He was a spiritual hero. He was pre-eminent amongst men. Even the Sankaracharya of Sringeri Mutt revered him, gave him his own seat and called him Mahasannidhanam.

Sundaresa Swamigal was a power-house of spiritual energy. His very presence was thrilling and inspiring. By his magnetic touch, a dead boy came back to life; a girl entered into Samadhi. Lord Siva Himself fed him on several occasions when he was practising Nirvikalpa Samadhi in thick bushes.

Sundaresa Swamigal guided countless aspirants in the attainment of Brahma Jnana. He wrote in Tamil many valuable and wonderful books on Vedanta which are full of practical spiritual instructions and experiences. The most important books are *Swanubhutirasayana*, *Anubhava Rasa Manjari* and *Nijananda Vilas*. Sundaresa Swamigal translated *Brahma Gita* into Tamil.

Sundaresa Swamigal entered into Maha Samadhi in 1881 at Arimalam, near Pudukkottai in Tamil Nadu.

This is the barest outline of the life of a magnanimous soul, a Jivanmukta who led a life of purity, sacrifice, love and saintliness. Glory to Sundaresa Swamigal who was a beacon-light and a torch-bearer of India. May his blessings be upon us all!

Great as a sage, profound as a scholar and philosopher, talented as a speaker, unfailing as a spiritual teacher, Sundaresa Swamigal was a source of inspiration and help to countless people during his lifetime. And even now his soul sheds light, joy, bliss and peace from his new immortal abode. May the memory of his sublime and ideal life and dynamic personality be an unfailing source of inspiration to us all! May his sterling qualities of head and heart and his precious teachings serve as a beacon to us in our silent march to the goal!! May he shower his ceaseless and choicest blessings on us from his new abode of supreme bliss and perennial joy!!

NARAYANA GURU

Sri Narayana Guru, the famous saint, social reformer and spiritual leader of Kerala, was born in Malabar in 1854. He was a great scholar in Sanskrit, Malayalam and Tamil. He wandered far and wide in his spiritual search for an answer to the problem of life. Very little is known of his early years.

Sri Narayana Guru first attracted attention as a wandering Sannyasin some thirty years later near the village of Neyyattankara in South Travancore. The villagers served him with faith and devotion.

Early in youth, the injustice of shutting out Harijans from e Hindu temples aroused in Sri Narayana Guru an intense npathy for them. He opened a temple for Harijans (Thiyas). s was his first public work. He conquered all opposition ough his will force and wisdom. Hundreds of institutions bodying his principles sprang up throughout Kerala. ools and dispensaries and Ashrams built in his name are flourishing now. In every one of them the message of unity prevails.

Sri Narayana Guru broke through the thick crust of custom, removed the mud of corruption and the veil of ignorance and released the nectar of freedom.

Sri Narayana Guru was serene, kind and humorous. He possessed keen intelligence and an indomitable will. He was the essence of Vedanta personified. Through dedicated action he won the hearts of thousands of outcaste followers of his in Kerala.

Sri Narayana Guru encouraged students and the middle class people to study Sanskrit and the Western sciences. His purpose was to lay the foundations of a cooperative brotherhood, which through spontaneous public service, would truly reflect the unity at the heart of things that is longed for by all men.

In his later years, Sri Narayana Guru became known throughout India. Many famous people paid homage to him and his main centre of activity in Kerala. Sri Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi visited his Ashram. Sri Narayana Guru travelled annually throughout South India and Ceylon.

Sri Narayana Guru's anniversary is celebrated throughout South India and Ceylon, about the beginning of September. The occasion is marked by the pomp and splendour of processions and meetings, attended with fitting reverence.

Sri Narayana Guru's life and thought were universal. His teachings and his brilliant example were for all mankind.

Sri Narayana Guru was a mystic, a practical Yogi. He had studied minutely the sacred books of India. He was very dynamic. He showed that the principles of Vedanta could be applied in daily life. His entire life's work was an example of how it could be done.

To Sri Narayana Guru, the embodiment of Advaita, Kerala, India and the whole world owe an immense debt of gratitude which can best be repaid by following his principles and teachings and his glorious example.

RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA

The nineteenth century saw India faced with a great crisis. With the British conquest of India came the invasion of Western civilization upon the country. Awed by the material power of the conquering nation, Indians hailed everything Western as a thing to be welcomed. In the meantime, Christianity—one of the greatest proselytizing religions of the world—began to work silently for a thorough cultural conquest of the land.

At this psychological moment appeared Sri Ramakrishna, an embodiment of the spirit of India's culture and religion. He opened the eyes of the Indians to the beauty, grandeur and strength of Hinduism at a time when their faith in them greatly slackened.

Ramakrishna was born on February 18, 1836 in the village of Kamarpukur in the district of Hooghly in Bengal, of a pious Brahmin family. His parents named him Gadadhar. From his very birth, Gadadhar cast a spell not only over his parents and relatives, but also over his neighbours. He began to show wonderful intelligence and memory even at the early age of five. The precocious boy learnt by heart the names of his ancestors, hymns to various gods and goddesses, and tales from the great national epics. His father sent him to the village school where he made fair progress and directed all his attention to the study of the life and character of spiritual heroes. A constant study of these subjects often made him forgetful of the world and threw him into deep meditation. As Gadadhar grew older, he began to have trances whenever his religious feelings were roused. On account of family circumstances, he came to Calcutta where he was entrusted with the duties of a priest. At that time there was living in Calcutta a rich widow of great piety named Rani Rasmani. She built a Kali temple at Dakshineswar where Gadadhar felt quite at home and found greater opportunities to pursue his spiritual practices. Gadadhar was married at a young age to a girl-wife, Sarada Devi, who later became known as the *'Holy Mother'* to the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna.

Ramakrishna had a catholic spirit from the very beginning. He made no distinction between one form of God and another. The realisation of one aspect of the Reality inspired him to take up another and to follow it with unflinching devotion till that aspect of Truth revealed itself. Referring to this period of his life Sri Ramakrishna often said afterwards, "No sooner was one state transcended than another took its place. Before that whirlwind, the sacred thread was blown away, and even the wearing cloth hardly remained.....The idea of caste lost all meaning for me.....".

Ramakrishna entered into Mahasamadhi and departed from the world on August 16th, 1886.

Some sayings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa

1. God is formless and God is with form too, and He is That which transcends both form and formlessness. He alone can say what else He is.
2. It is ignorance and folly to attempt to circumscribe God. He is both attributeless and with attributes at one and the same time. He is also beyond both. Take the instance of ice, water and vapour.
3. God with form is visible, nay, we can touch Him, as one does his dearest friend.
4. As long as the sound of a bell is audible, it exists in the region of form; but when it is no longer heard, it is formless. Similarly, God is both formless and with form.
5. The sun lights up the earth, but a small cloud hides it from our view. Similarly, the insignificant veil of Maya prevents us from seeing the omnipresent and all-witnessing Satchidananda.
6. When shall I be free? When that 'I' vanishes. 'I' and 'Mine' is ignorance; 'Thou' and 'Thine' is knowledge.
7. By acquiring the conviction that all is done by the will of God, one becomes only a tool in His hands. Then one is free, even in this life.

8. If you want in right earnest to be good and pure, God will send you the right teacher. Earnestness is the one thing necessary.
9. As a boy holding a post whirls about it with headlong speed without fear of falling, so perform your worldly duties, fixing your hold firmly upon God, and you shall be free from danger.
10. A person living in society, especially as a householder, should make a show of the spirit of resisting evil for purposes of self-defence, but at the same time, try to avoid paying back evil for evil.
11. He is born to no purpose who, having the rare privilege of being born a man, is unable to realise God in this life.
12. You cannot get butter by crying yourself hoarse, "There is butter in the milk". If you wish to make butter, you must turn the milk into curds, and churn it well. Then alone you can get butter. So if you long to see God, practise spiritual exercises.
13. You will see God if your love for Him is as strong as that of the attachment of the worldly-minded person for things of the world.
14. The darkness of centuries is dispersed as soon as a single light is brought into the room. The accumulated ignorance and misdoings of innumerable births vanish at one glance of the gracious eyes of God.
15. Pray to Him in any way you will. He is sure to hear you, for He hears even the footfall of an ant.

SRI AUROBINDO GHOSH

Birth and parentage

On Thursday, the 15th August, 1871, at about 5 a.m., Sri Aurobindo was born of Sri Krishnadhan and Swarnalata, at Calcutta, in Bengal, in a reputed Ghosh family of Konnagar. Sri Krishnadhan went to England and returned an M.D., full of honours.

Raj Narayan Bose, an acknowledged leader in Bengali literature, a writer in the "*Modern Review*" and the grandfather of Indian nationalism was Sri Aurobindo's maternal grandfather. Aurobindo owes not only his rich spiritual nature, but even his very superior literary capacity, to his mother's line.

An accomplished scholar

Aurobindo was sent to the Loretto Convent School at Darjeeling when he was four years old. As a boy, Aurobindo received his early education in a public school in England. The old headmaster of the school observed, "Of all the boys who passed through my hands during the last 25 or 30 years, Aurobindo was by far the most richly endowed with intellectual capacity".

From school Aurobindo went to King's College, Cambridge, where he distinguished himself as a student of European classics. He passed the Indian Civil Service Examination with great credit in 1890. Failing, however, to stand the required test in horsemanship, he was not allowed to enter the Covenantal Service of the Indian Government. But, returning to India, he became the Vice-principal of the State college in Baroda. He was held in great respect by the Maharaja of Baroda.

Aurobindo's scholarship soon attracted the notice of all. He was loved by the educated classes in Baroda State. He was exceedingly popular with the general public. Sri K.M. Munshi was one of his students. Munshi admired and loved Aurobindo. To the younger generation, Aurobindo became a veritable god and by them he was called as "*Aru Da*", meaning "elder brother Aurobindo". Aurobindo married Mrinalini Devi.

Aurobindo was an accomplished scholar in Greek. He got high distinction in Latin. He learnt French very well and picked up a little of German and Italian to study Goethe and Dante in the original. He was steeped in the lore of our ancient Vedic scriptures.

Sri Aurobindo was a genius in history and poetry, a scholar in English and Latin. He was in England for fourteen years. When he was only seven years of age, Dr. K.D. Ghosh sent him to England to be steeped in Western education. That early age was chosen deliberately in order that Aurobindo might forget the native touch and learn to adopt the Western forms instead.

Apostle of Indian nationalism

It was in 1893 that Aurobindo came back to India. He drew a salary of Rs. 750/- in the Baroda Educational Service. From 1893 to 1906 he drank deep from the fountains of Sanskrit and Bengali literature, philosophy and political science. He then resigned his job and joined the Bengal National College on a salary of Rs. 150/-. He plunged headlong into the revolutionary movement. He was a great figure in the nationalist movements of the time.

Aurobindo edited the English daily *Bande Mataram* and wrote fearless and pointed editorials. During the next few months, he started the English weekly *Dharma*. He spread his message: "Our ideal of Swaraj is absolute autonomy, absolute self-rule, free from foreign control". In those days, Aurobindo openly advocated the boycott of British goods, British courts and everything British. He always asked the people to prepare themselves for passive resistance.

Sri Aurobindo, the prophet of Indian nationalism, was one of the pioneers of political awakening in India. He was the leader of the revolutionary movement. He played a great part in the country's national struggle from 1908. He was in the forefront of the national struggle during the days of the partition of Bengal.

Awakened to the Divine Mission

The famous Alipore Bomb Case was the turning point in Sri Aurobindo's life. For a year Aurobindo was an undertrial prisoner in solitary confinement in the Alipore Central Jail. It was in a dingy cell of the Alipore Jail that he dreamt the dream of his future life, the divine mission ordained for him by God.

Aurobindo bore the rigours of the imprisonment, the bad food, the inadequate clothes, the lack of light and free air, the strain of boredom and the creeping solitariness of the gloomy cell. He utilized this period of incarceration for an intense study and practice of the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. Chittaranjan Das defended Sri Aurobindo, who was acquitted after a memorable trial.

His practice of Yoga

Sri Aurobindo began his Yoga in 1904. He had no helper or Guru in Yoga till he met Lele, a Maharashtrian Yogi in Baroda; and that was only for a short time. Meditating only for three days with Lele,. Aurobindo followed the Yogi's instructions for silencing the mind and freeing it from the constant pressure of thought.

Sri Aurobindo himself once wrote in a letter about his practice of Yoga: "I began my Yoga in 1904 without a Guru. In 1908 I received important help from a Mahratti Yogi and discovered the foundations of my Sadhana". He started Yoga by himself, getting the rule from a friend, a disciple of Brahmananda of Ganga Mutt. It was confined at first to assiduous practice of Pranayama, for six or more hours a day. Aurobindo practised and meditated on the teachings of the Gita and the Upanishads.

Ashram at Pondicherry

Sri Aurobindo migrated from Calcutta to Chandranagar and later reached Pondicherry on April 4, 1910. At Pondicherry, he stayed at a friend's place. At first, he lived there with four or five companions. Gradually the number of members increased. An Ashram grew up around him. Now there are hundreds of inmates in the Ashram accommodated in more than a hundred houses. The Ashramites are engaged in various activities connected with the Ashram—some in the dairy, some in the vegetable garden, yet others in the laundry and the small bakery. Most of the young girls work in the Ashram's own printing press. To the Ashram inmates, all activities form a part of their Sadhana. Here life is an undivided whole, not consisting of water-tight compartments.

The Ashram has a school of its own. Here stress is laid on physical culture. Vocational education is imparted to pupils between the ages of 14 to 18.

In 1920, Mira, a French lady—wife of one Paul Richard—who was imbued with the same ideal, joined the Sri Aurobindo circle. She became the Mother and presided over the Ashram. Every morning she gave Darshan to the eager devotees from the balcony adjoining her room. She supervised every little item of the organization of the Ashram.

The Ashramites in Sri Aurobindo Ashram are not Sannyasins. Aurobindo himself was not a Sannyasin, but a Rishi.

The Ashram is a cosmopolitan one. There are Christians, Zoroastrians, Muslims and members of other creeds.

Aurobindo gave Darshan to his devotees on four days a year.

All the activities of the Ashram are managed by the Sadhaks.

The Ashram started the "*Arya*", an English spiritual journal under the management of the Mother and Paul Richard. The most significant works of Aurobindo appeared serially in the magazine. The *Arya* stopped publication after six and a half years.

Sri Rabindranath Tagore once visited the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and said to Aurobindo: "You have the word and we are waiting to accept it from you. India will speak through your voice to the world".

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is in a sense practical. It is based on facts, experience and personal realisations and on having the vision of a seer or Rishi. Aurobindo's spirituality is inseparably united with reason.

The goal aimed at by Sri Aurobindo is not merely the liberation of the individual from the chain that fetters him, but "to work out the will of the Divine in the world, to effect a spiritual transformation and to bring down the divine nature and a divine life into the mental, vital and physical nature and life of humanity".

"A fixed and unfailing aspiration that calls from below and a Supreme Grace that answers from above are two powers which in their conjunction can effect this. If the transformation is to be integral, integral should be the rejection of all that withstands it" says the Master Sri Aurobindo.

"The call upon us" says Sri Aurobindo, "is to grow into the image of God, to dwell in Him and with Him and be a channel of His joy and might and an instrument of His works. Purified from all that is Asubha (Evil), we have to act in the world as dynamos of that Divine Electricity and send it thrilling and radiating through mankind, so that wherever one of us stands, hundreds around may become full of His light and force, full of God and full of Ananda. Churches, theologies, philosophies have failed to save mankind because they have busied themselves with intellectual creeds and institutions....as if these could save mankind, and have neglected the one thing needful, the power and purification of the soul".

Aurobindo's *Life Divine* is, and will always remain, a force guiding the thoughts of men all over the world. His other publications are *Essays on Gita, Ideal and Progress, Isa Upanishad, The Superman, Evolution, Heraclitus, The Ideal of the Karmayogin, The Brain of India, the Renaissance in India, Bases of Yoga, Kalidasa, Vikramorvasi or The Hero and the Nymph, Poems, The Riddle of This World,* etc.

The sage's Mahasamadhi

Sri Aurobindo passed away at 1.30 a.m. on 5th December, 1950 at Pondicherry. He was 78 years old. He was suffering from kidney trouble for a fortnight and was attended upon by Dr. Prabhakar Sen.

One more glorious child of Mother India thus laid himself to rest in Her bosom. One more lamp that had shed its light of divine wisdom throughout the world thus disappeared in its own lustre, even as camphor dissolves into the fire. Sri Aurobindo thus attained union with Sri Aravinda—the lotus-eyed Lord of the Universe.

Sri Aurobindo was a poet, politician and philosopher. His writings—philosophic and poetic—are Indian in spirit and Western in rhythm and colour. He was the greatest intellectual of our age and a major force for the life of the spirit. India will not forget his services to politics and philosophy. The world will remember with gratitude his invaluable works in the realms of philosophy and religion.

Aurobindo was one of the greatest of world figures. He was an inspiration to the nationalists of India. Looked at as a religious teacher, his writings will live as long as the world survives.

The crest-jewel of renascent India, the bravest among the patriots, the sharpest among the intellectuals, and the subtlest among the seers, Sri Aurobindo fulfilled the glorious purpose of demonstrating to the world that real India, the India of the Vedic seers, could survive and absorb into herself all alien cultures, and that at the hands of one who knew the proper synthesis, Eastern and Western cultures could find their happy blend, without necessarily having to antagonize one another. Sri Aurobindo's *Life Divine*—the divine life that he lived and preached—will live for ever, inspiring mankind. Posterity will hail him as a member of the galaxy of Vedic seers. May his Light ever shine.

SWAMI SWAYAMPRAKASA BRAHMENDRA SARASWATI

Krishnamoorthy was the previous name of Swami Swayamprakasa Brahmendraji. He was born of Ramaswami Sastrigal, a pious Vedic scholar and a poor but respectable Brahmin, and Janaki, a woman of high-souled purity, in the village of Kalpattu in the district of South Arcot, Tamil Nadu, on Tuesday, the 28th of November 1871.

Swami Brahmendraji was educated in three places: Thiruvidaimarudur, Kumbakonam and Thiruvananthapuram. He passed the Matriculation Examination and took to the study of Sanskrit in right earnest. He studied under Bala Saraswati Bhatta Sri Narayana Sastrigal, an erudite scholar. Afterwards he studied Tamil poetry. Swamiji had a wonderful retentive memory. He quoted long passages with proper contexts and comments with perfect ease.

Krishnamoorthy worked as a School Master in a neighbouring village for some time. Thereupon he joined the Settlement Department as a clerk on a monthly salary of Rs. 50/-.

Krishnamoorthy was urged by his brother to marry, but he refused with determination. He gave up his job and turned his steps towards the North in search of a Guru. At Kashi he met Swami Dakshinamoorthy and stayed with him as his disciple for three years. He studied Vedanta thoroughly under the Swami. He served a silent Muni in Kashi for six months.

Therefrom Krishnamoorthy went to a cave above the Bana Tirtha near Papanasam, Tirunelveli District, where he saw a radiant Sannyasin, the Avadhuta Sadguru Brahmendra Saraswati, commonly known as the Judge Swamigal.

In order to test Krishnamoorthy, the Avadhuta Swami threw stones at him. Krishnamoorthy bore everything with patience. He even supplied stones to the Swamigal for throwing. The Swami found out that Krishnamoorthy was quite ripe for initiation.

According to the directions of the Swami, Krishnamoorthy went to his own house at Kanappettai, on the Full Moon Day in the month of June 1891. 'He stayed with his mother for three hours. His clothes fell down of their own accord. He took Avadhutashram at once.

Swami Swayamprakasa Brahmendra Saraswati roamed about here and there. He ate what he could get when he was hungry and took rest when he was tired. He visited Nerur in the district of Tiruchirapalli, where there is the Samadhi of Sadasiva Brahman. He wandered through the various villages in the district of Thanjavur. He remained in a cave at Tiruvannamalai for some months. He made a tour all over India. He went to Badrinath also.

As Swami Brahmendra was nude, the police people locked him up, but he was released by Krishnaswami, a prominent advocate.

Swami Brahmendra was poisoned. His hair and beard were burnt. He was tempted by women of ill-repute brought by wicked men. He was dragged along the streets in the hot sun, with a rope tied around his waist. Finally, the Swami proceeded to the village of Sendamangalam in Salem District and wandered in the Kolli hills. He chose a small hillock in Sendamangalam for his abode and performance of penance. Sri K. Sundaram Chettiar, a retired High Court Judge, served the Swami with faith and devotion.

Swami Brahmendra was a living example of spiritual eminence. He practised the severe austerities of the Avadhuta Ashrama. Many were his physical sufferings on account of his nudity and phenomenal was his patience at the gibes and sneers of worldly-minded, ignorant youth. Early in life he abandoned the pleasures and comforts of the world. He braved the razor path of Nivritti Marga with a burning desire for Self-realisation. He pursued the course under the blessings of his Sadguru with unabated vigour. He was a spiritual guide to a large number of disciples. Men, women and children have been the recipients of his benediction.

In order to infuse devotion and piety into the hearts of people, the Swamiji wanted to instal an idol of Sri Dattatreya in his Ashram. While the Swamiji was living, his devoted disciple Swami Sankarananda, in his excessive love and reverence for the Swamiji, took immense pains to build a temple over the hillock, in the Ashram, for installing the idol of Dattatreya and also the marble statue of the Swamiji. The marble statue of the Swamigal and the idol of Lord Dattatreya in that two-storeyed temple reveal the marvellous ingenuity of the artist who made them. This attractive temple on the hillock, with its calm and inspiring surroundings, and the improved Ashram owe their existence and present charming appearance to the strenuous, indefatigable efforts and remarkable patience and ability of Swami Sankarananda.

The *Guhalaya* there is built on the Sannyasikaradu or Sannyasikundu. The hillock is called as Dattagiri now. The Dattatreya temple and the *Guhalaya* of Sendamangalam will flourish as lasting monuments, reminding the people of the glory and greatness of the holy sage who entered into Mahasamadhi in the month of December 1948.

SWAMI RAMA TIRTHA

Swami Rama Tirtha, a direct descendant of Gosain Tulsi Das, the immortal author of the widely read Hindi Ramayan, was born in 1873, at Muraliwala, in the district of Gujranwala, Punjab.

Rama Tirtha was a very bright student, a genius possessing unusual intelligence, contemplative nature and an intrinsic love of mathematics and solitude. He topped the list in B.A. and took his M.A. degree in Mathematics, a subject in which he was exceptionally bright.

For two years, Rama Tirtha was a Professor of Mathematics in the Lahore Foreman Christian College, and he acted as a Reader for a short time in the Lahore Oriental College.

In the year 1900, Rama Tirtha went to the forest and soon became a Sannyasin. He went to America and Japan and hrilled the Americans and the Japanese with his inspiring and soul-elevating speeches. In Egypt he was accorded a hearty welcome by the Mohammedans, to whom he delivered a lecture in Persian in their mosque. Rama Tirtha was ever cheerful and brilliant with eyes beaming with divine lustre and joy. He was perfectly at home in Persian, English, Hindi, Urdu and Sanskrit literature.

Rama Tirtha was a great ascetic and an enlightened mystic. He practised Yoga on the banks of the river Ravi. Later he lived in the forests of Brahmapuri, on the banks of the river Ganges, five miles away from Rishikesh and attained Self-realisation.

Today Rama Tirtha is not present amongst us in his mortal coil, but he is truly ever alive, eternal and imperishable, ever shining as a beacon-star in the spiritual firmament of the world. He had the highest realisation of the Satchidananda as the all-inclusive Bliss-supreme. The ancient sages and modern saints have proved this ineffable nature of the Supreme, not by logical proofs of perception and knowledge, but by actual experience of it which cannot be communicated to others for want of means. And Swami Rama Tirtha was one among such Experiencers of the Ultimate Bliss.

Under the holy guidance of Sri R.S. Narayana Swami, a direct disciple of Swami Rama Tirtha, the Ramatirtha Publication League was established at Lucknow. Every lover and admirer of Sri Rama Tirtha's soul-inspiring teachings owes a deep debt of gratitude to Sri Narayana Swamiji and the League for taking immense pains in making Rama Tirtha's works available to the world.

Sri Swami Rama Tirtha is one of the brightest jewels of India's genius. Rama belongs to that prophetic group of inspired seers who rang up the curtain of Indian Renaissance and ushered in the era of a strongly positive, aggressive and all-conquering spirituality. His advent into Bharatavarsha was potent with a great significance to man in modern times.

From Rama India has inherited the dual gems of Vedantic boldness and spiritual patriotism. The spiritual patriotism of Rama is something unique and grand. Every son of India should absorb it and make it his own. Swami Rama emphatically declared that if you must have intense and real patriotism, then you must deify the Motherland, behold Bharatavarsha as the living Goddess. "If you must realise unity with God, realise first your unity with the Whole Nation. Let this intense feeling of identity with every creature within this land be throbbing in every fibre of your frame" said Rama, "Let every son of India stand for the Whole, seeing that the Whole of India is embodied in every son. When streams, stones and trees are personified and sacrificed to in India, why not sanctify, deify the great Mother that cradles you and nourishes you? Through Prana-pratishtha you vitalize an idol of stone or an effigy of clay. How much more worthwhile would it be to call forth the inherent glory and evoke fire and life in the Deity that is Mother India?". Thus, to Rama, the national Dharma of love to the motherland was a spiritual Dharma of Virat Prem. Let every Indian today fervently take this legacy into his heart. By this act show your real appreciation of the great seer; show your gratitude to the great seer. Thus can you glorify his life and his teachings.

The highest realisation of patriotism, Rama believed, lay in fully identifying yourself with the land of your birth. Remember his words: "Tune yourself in love with your country and people". Be a spiritual soldier. Lay down your life in the interest of your land abnegating the little ego, and having thus loved the country, feel anything and the country will feel with you. March and the country will follow. This, indeed, is practical Vedanta.

Rama Tirtha infused in the minds of people a new joy, a happy conviction that it was not for nothing that we lived in a miserable earth, and that we did not, after a long struggle in the sea of life, reach a waterless desert where our sorrows would be repeated. He lived practical philosophy, and through that showed to the world that it was possible to rejoice in the bliss of the Self even in this very life, and that everyone could partake of this bliss if one sincerely strived for it.

Swami Rama was an exemplary figure in the field of Vedantic life. He was a practical, bold Vedantin. He lived a dynamic life in the spirit of the Self. Very high were his ideals, sublime were his views, and perennial and spontaneous was his love. He was Divinity personified and love-incarnate. He is ever alive as a dynamic soul-force, ever shedding the spiritual effulgence in the heart of every seeker after Truth. His teachings are inspiring, elevating and illuminating—a fountain of his intuitive experiences.

The teachings of Rama Tirtha are peculiarly direct and forceful. They are unique. Rama Tirtha did not teach any particular Yoga or Sadhana or propound any abstract philosophical theory. He taught the actual living of Vedanta, of Yoga and Sadhana. This he taught by his own personal example. In himself he embodied an exposition of illumined living. Thus Rama Tirtha's very personality itself preached and taught as much as any of the innumerable discourses and lectures he delivered to crowded audiences from platforms that ranged from Tokyo to Toronto.

To the West, Swami Rama appeared not merely as a wise man of the East but as the Wisdom of the East come in tangible form. Rama Tirtha was a blissful being inebriated with the ecstasy of Spiritual Consciousness. And his bliss was infectious. His glance flashed forth Vedanta. His smile radiated the joy of the Spirit. Vedanta streamed forth in his inspired utterance and in his whole life; every action, gesture and movement vibrated with the thrill of Vedantic Consciousness.

Rama Tirtha demonstrated how Vedanta might be lived. His life was an expression of the supreme art of living life in all its richness of vision and fullness of joy. Rama Tirtha presented Vedanta not so much as a knowing and a realising, as a becoming and a being. It was Swami Rama Tirtha's unique distinction that he expounded Vedanta as a supreme yet simple art of living. He did not try to take people to Vedanta, but he took Vedanta to the common man. Swami Rama Tirtha took Vedanta into the quiet homes, into the busy offices, into the crowded streets and into the noisy markets of the western world.

Both to the East and to the West, therefore, Swami Rama's life has been a boon and a blessing. For India, he vivified Vedanta with the vitality of his own inspired life and shining example. He shook India out of fantasy, superstition and misconception; he shocked America to wakefulness and an awareness of the intrinsic worth of the practicality of Atmic living. He revealed how the central secret of all lofty activity lay in attunement with the Divine Law of oneness, harmony and bliss.

To rise above the petty self and act impersonally—this was the key to divine living. His call to his countrymen was: "May you wake up to your oneness with Life, Light and Love (Sat-Chit-Ananda) and immediately the Central Bliss will commence springing forth from you in the shape of happy heroic work and both wisdom and virtue. This is inspired life, this is your birthright".

To the Americans Rama taught the way of perfect morality and total abstinence. Keeping the body in active struggle and the mind in rest and loving abstinence means salvation from sin and sorrow, right here in this very life. Active realisation of at-one-ment with the All allows us a life of balanced recklessness. This sums up Rama's message to the land of the Dollar.

In short, Swami Rama's thrilling life is a flashing example of rare Prem and a divine spontaneity. Listen! Here Rama's voice whispers: "You have simply to shine as the Soul of All, as the Source of Light, as the Spring of Delight, O Blessed One! And energy, life activity will naturally begin to radiate from you. The flower blooms, and lo! fragrance begins to emanate of itself". Awake India! Respond to this call of Rama. Realise the Bliss that is Yourself. Come now, live the life in the Atman. From this moment let Rama enter into your heart and animate your actions and inspire your actions and inspire your very life! May his Divine Spirit vivify and raise India to her pristine glory and Vedantic grandeur! Live in Om!

SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

Sri Ramana Maharshi was born on 30th December, 1879. He was known as Venkataraman. Born in a pious middle class Brahmin family, he went to a mission school and learnt a little English.

Flight from home

On the 29th of August 1896, Venkataraman left his home in the district of Madurai in search of his Father, Lord Arunachala, to whom he reported himself on the 1st of September 1896, thus:

O Lord, obedient to Thy call
Here have I come, deserting all,
No boon I ask, no loss bemoan,
Take me in and make me Thine own.

From that day till the end of his earthly sojourn, Venkataraman made Arunachala (Tiruvannamalai) his abode, transmitting through Mouna, the golden language of his egoless state, the Message of Eternal Truth, to the four corners of the globe.

Venkataraman left a note behind to his rebuking brother: "I have, in search of my Father, according to His command, started from this place. On a virtuous enterprise, indeed, I have this day embarked. Therefore, for this action none need grieve or trace this one. No money need be spent for searching me".

The Great Enlightenment

"It was about six weeks before I left Madurai for good, in the middle of the year 1896, that the great change in my life took place" said Sri Ramana Maharshi, when asked by devotees as to how he was transformed, "It was so sudden. One day I sat up alone on the first floor of my uncle's house. I was in my usual good health. But a sudden and unmistakable fear of death seized me. I felt I was going to die and at once set about thinking as to what I should do. I did not care to consult anyone, be he a doctor, elder or friend. I felt I had to solve the problem myself then and there. The shock of the fear of death made me at once introspective or 'introverted'. I said to myself mentally, 'Now that death is come, what does it mean? Who is it that is dying? This body dies'. I at once dramatised the situation. I extended my limbs and held them rigid as though *rigor mortis* had set in. I imitated a corpse to lend an air of reality to my further investigation. I held my breath and kept my mouth closed, pressing the lips tightly together, so that no sound could escape. 'Well then' I said to myself, 'this body is dead. It will be carried to the crematory and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of my body, am *I* dead? Is the body *I*? This body is silent and inert. But I am still aware of the full force of my personality and even of the sound of *I* within myself as apart from the body. The material body dies, but the Spirit transcending it cannot be touched by death. I am therefore the deathless Spirit'. All this was not a feat of intellectual gymnastics, but came as a flash before me vividly as living Truth, which I perceived immediately, without any argument almost. *I* was something very real, the only real thing in that state, and all the conscious activity that was connected with my body was centred on that. The *I* or myself was holding the focus of attention with a powerful fascination. Fear of death vanished at once and for ever. The absorption in the Self has continued from that moment right up to now".

Tapas of Maharshi

Ramana practised Tapas in the thousand-pillared Mandapam, near the Patala Linga, in Subrahmanya's shrine, in the Mango garden, the Sadguru Swami cave and Cora hills. From 1909 to 1916 he lived in the Virupakshi Cave.

During his days of Tapas, mischievous boys pelted him with stones and hurled tiles at him; and yet Ramana was ever peaceful and calm through the strength of meditation and penance.

Ramana Maharshi was known as Brahmana Swami in Tiruvannamalai. Kavya Kanta Ganapathy Sastri, the great

Sanskrit scholar, came to Ramana's Ashram in 1908 and stayed with Maharshi and wrote the *Ramana Gita.*

The life of the Maharshi was one continued meditation, Ananda Anubhavam. Maharshi established peace within. He lived in the Light of the Lord within. He encouraged others to do the same thing. To him all the world was one.

Maharshi seldom talked, and whenever he did speak, he did so only because it was absolutely necessary.

His divine message

Ramana was a living example of the teaching of the Upanishads. His life was at once the message and the philosophy of his teachings. He spoke to the hearts of men.

The great Maharshi found Himself within himself and then gave out to the world the grand but simple message of his great life, "Know Thyself".

"Know Thyself. All else will be known to thee of its own accord. Discriminate between the undying, unchanging, all-pervading, infinite Atma and the ever-changing, phenomenal and perishable universe and body. Enquire, 'Who am I?'. Make the mind calm. Free yourself from all thoughts other than the simple thought of the Self or Atma. Dive deep into the chambers of your heart. Find out the real, infinite 'I'. Rest there peacefully for ever and become identical with the Supreme Self." This is the gist of the philosophy and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Sri Ramana says, "The world is so unhappy because it is ignorant of the true Self. Man's real nature is happiness. Happiness is inborn in the true Self. Man's search for happiness is an unconscious search for his true Self. The true Self is imperishable; therefore, when a man finds it, he finds a happiness which does not come to an end.

"In the interior cavity of the heart, the One Supreme Being is ever glowing with the Self-conscious emanation I...I... To realise Him, enter into the heart with an one-pointed mind—by quest within or diving deep or control of breath—and abide with the Self of self".

Sri Ramana's *Who am I?, Upadesa Saram* and *Ullathu*

Narpathu are pearls of direct wisdom, expressed in aphoristic terseness.

Sri B.V. Narasimha Swami, the late President of the All India Sai Samaj, has published a thrilling life of Ramana entitled, "Self-realisation". Yogi Suddhananda Bharati has written the life of Sri Ramana in Tamil.

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi has set at naught the prattle of materialists that Self-realisation and Samadhi are things of the remote past, and that in the present age, they are impossible of achievement to man. He has shown by his lifelong Samadhi that it is still possible to realise the Supreme and live in that realisation.

Beloved aspirant! Take heart. Gird up your loins. Apply yourself intensely to Yoga Sadhana. You will soon attain Videha Kaivalya and shine for ever as an illumined sage.

The Light shines brighter than ever

Lieut-Col. P.V. Karamchandani,. I.M.S., D.M.O., North Arcot District, attended on Sri Ramana when the latter suffered from a kind of malignant tumour in his upper left arm above the elbow. The Maharshi was operated four times.

A meteor hit the sky at 8-47 p.m. on the 14th April, 1950, when Sri Ramana Maharshi left his mortal coil and entered Mahasamadhi.

The all-pervading Light which shone through the embodiment of that Light in Maharshi Ramana had once again resolved itself into its original state. A lifelong proof of the Upanishads was what we called Maharshi Ramana. That proof will for ever exist, reassuring us of the Ultimate Reality.

The saint is no more in his mortal frame. But the Light of his soul is now merged in every receptive individual soul. Maharshi Ramana lives in our heart. His passing away should not be grieved for. For he had fulfilled the mission of his life. He had achieved the highest goal, Self-realisation. So there is nothing to grieve for. The death of only those that are not able to achieve the goal of life or do their duty has any reason to be mourned. The Light of the Maharshi's soul shines today brighter than ever.

In the heart of humanity the saint shall live for ever, guiding, encouraging, goading and inspiring, so that millions and millions might seek and find the Great Truth that Ramana realised.

Too well did Sri Ramana expound the Vedanta philosophy, not through bookish knowledge, but by practical experience. His teachings imparted through all-absorbing 'Silence' embodied the highest ideals and the ultimate reaches in divine realisation. To ever assert one's latent divinity, to ever strive to live in the consciousness of the immortal Self and to remain as an unaffected witness of the transitory phases of life immersed in that Supreme Silence—was the clarion call of the Maharshi. Dogmas and religious prejudices he cared not for! For he was far above those mundane limitations. With him lived orthodox Brahmin priests, Moslems and Christians and the so-called Indian untouchables. They were all alike to him.

As an architect-supreme of Truth-transcendental, Ramana Maharshi led, and now leads on, the weary travellers on earth towards the Goal through his unfathomable Silence.

To pay the most befitting homage to that saintly personality is to follow his teachings and to grow up in that ideal model.

May peace be unto all!

SAINT GUDIDI BABA

Saint Gudidi Baba was one of the greatest Siddhas of Bharatavarsha who lived in recent times. He saved many a youth from becoming an atheist. He showed by his own wonderful miracles the power and strength of spiritual glory. To those who would laugh in utter disregard of the Shastras and consider them as mere trash literature written by ancient men of India, he showed by the strength of his own spiritual powers how true and reliable they were. He saved many young men from the clutches of materialism. He was a Siddha Mahatma. He could get in his own hands things which were distant from him by thousands of miles. He had a perfect knowledge of herbs and medicines. This great Mahatma blessed our motherland till recently. He left his mortal coil on the 6th March, 1951.

Thirty years ago this saint first came to Pilkhuva when he had only one *Gudidi*, a light covering with a small quantity of cotton enclosed within. In that covering there were a number of variegated pieces of cloth in different colours stitched together. The Baba had with him a small vessel and a bamboo shell. This shell he utilised for drinking water or milk. Full with the divine consciousness he would use the same bamboo shell as an instrument to sing songs. He had no other possession with him. He could sing well the songs of Kabir, Nanak, Tulsidas, Dadu and other saints. He would take his hearers to the state of trance by his beautiful music and Bhajans.

In those days Pilkhuva was a centre of the Arya Samajists and the Congress people. Every week there were meetings where they condemned idol worship and Sanatana Dharma. They condemned Sraddhas, Tarpana and the Brahmins. Then Babaji was observing Mouna. So he was not talking to anyone. But sometimes he would loudly laugh, sometimes repeat some songs in ecstasy and at other times keep silent. Sometimes he spoke of Krishna Bhakti and sometimes of Vedanta—Kevala Advaita. He used to say often, "There is no second person. I am there alone. Who is to speak to whom? *Na Ham Na Tum Darbar Gum*".

Once Babaji beckoned a few Rajput children to him. He was then staying in one Siva temple. The children ran to him. Babaji removed a few threads from his *Gudidi* and gave one to each boy. He then asked them to close their hands. They all closed their hands. Then he asked them to open their hands. To their surprise they saw almonds, dried grapes, sugarcandy, etc. They all ate them gladly.

No one knew about his name, age, caste or order. He had always with him a *Gudidi* and so he was known as Gudidi Baba. But his face was shining with a glow and showed him to be a youth of thirty. Even when he first came to Pilkhuva, he was in a similar condition. Many people attributed many things to him. Some said he was a hundred years old and so on. Whenever he came to the town, thousands of people thronged around him for Darshan. Even the unbelievers flocked to him as days passed on. He used to call himself Shahanshah, meaning the Emperor. He had no desires. He had no worry. He did not care for anything. He wanted nothing from anyone. He had a small Langoti, a loin cloth. He took food without salt. The Lord dwelt in him and he dwelt in the Lord. Before such a saint even Indra was nothing.

In his spiritual fervour Gudidi Baba used to sing, "*Nanak Dukhia Sab Sansara, Sukhia Vahi Jo Nam Adhara*", meaning everyone in this world was miserable but he who had the Name of the Lord was very happy. Very often he would hold his hands up and in his hands came bunches of grapes and all the people around him ate them with great joy.

With all these, some atheists took Babaji to be a magician. They said, "This man is a rogue. He indulges in magic and cheats his devotees". Once there was a great crowd around Babaji. One devotee brought a glass of milk for Babaji and poured it in his bamboo vessel. Lo! To the surprise of all there was no milk there, but the vessel was full of grapes. A few of them Babaji gave to the man who brought the milk. All the opponents remained dumb at this wonderful incident.

In one day's gathering there were a number of non-believers. They denied God and everything Godly. Babaji asked one of them to bring a glass of milk for him. One from the group brought him a glass of milk. Babaji drank it pouring it in his bamboo vessel. He then gave back the glass and asked the man who brought him the milk to shake the empty glass. That man was a non-believer in God, but he obeyed and shook the glass three or four times. He then heard the sound of a rupee. Babaji then asked him to shake it again, and lo, there was another rupee. Thus he was asked to shake the vessel five times and there were five rupees. Baba said, "Pay the cost of milk with this". The audience was struck with wonder.

Once Gudidi Baba stayed with Mahatma Sri Atmaramji Maharaj in his Kutir. This attracted a very big crowd. Sri Sobharamji, B.A., B.T. and another teacher who was a total atheist came to see the Baba. They requested him to show them something very wonderful. Babaji in all humility said that he knew nothing as regards what the people were propagating about him. When pressed very hard, Babaji asked them what they wanted to see. They said that they wanted Kandahar pomegranate if he could get it for them. It was a time when pomegranate was not at all available anywhere. In a few minutes Babaji got a handkerchief with a pomegranate. He raised his hands and caught it. All were struck with wonder. They all tasted the pomegranate and it was the best variety. It was available only in Kandahar.

On another occasion, some children gathered round Gudidi Baba and wanted that they should be given almonds. In a moment the Baba showed up his hands and got the almonds which he distributed to all. A certain boy began to cry and say, "I do not want almonds. I want only *Peda*" which the Babaji got for the boy in a moment by showing his hands up.

On another occasion Lala Jagannath was going to Gaziabad on court work. Then Babaji approached him and asked him to give him soap and oil for his bath. Lalaji said that he was going on urgent business and so could not stop even a moment. Then Babaji put his hand in a well nearby, and lo, at once a big piece of soap and a bottle full of oil came up. Seeing which, all were wonderstruck. Babaji then took a nice bath.

Once Babaji went to Khurja. There he was acquainted with none. There was a cremation ground nearby. Babaji went and stayed there with his body smeared with ashes all over. He saw some of the college boys passing that way. He showed his hands up and he got a lot of pomegranates, almonds, etc., which he distributed to the boys and the whole elite of the city was attracted there in a minute.

Gudidi Babaji had a full knowledge of medicines too. He knew a number of medicines and cured people in a wonderful way. He extracted oil out of sulphur. On another occasion, some of the people in the village tried to extract oil out of sulphur, but they could not. Then Babaji came there and helped them in getting the oil. When questioned, he said, "You have to combine Mantra, Tantra and the best medicinal herbs".

Babaji helped so many Vaidyas in the preparation of very difficult medicines. He knew the method to solidify mercury and to make use of it in moving from place to place in the sky.

Once a devotee approached Babaji seeking blessings for a son. Then Babaji gave him Swarna Bhasma (gold ash) by taking which the devotee was blessed with a son. Doctors remained dumbfounded when they saw the proficiency of Babaji in dealing with certain cases which were incurable for them.

Gudidi Baba frequented Pilkhuva for nearly thirty years, but he never took food with any devotee. He had very rigid vows.

Babaji came to Pilkhuva in February 1951. He said, "My body has become old now. It wants a change. Long have I lived in this body. Now I would like to leave this body. This body is perishable. This will not serve me long". Later Babaji became very sick and he was taken to Meerut. He told everyone that he would leave the body very soon and to some devoted disciples he hinted the day and time also. This became true. He was being taken to Meerut and on the way he left his body in the motor car itself before reaching Meerut. Babaji's body was then consigned to Mother Ganges at Garhmukteswar.

SWAMI SIVANANDA

Swami Sivananda, whose name is all too familiar to spiritual aspirants, was born in 1887 in Pattamadai in Tamil Nadu. Initially he studied medicine and migrated to Malaysia where he served as a doctor in the rubber estates. Constant contact with human suffering made the doctor introspective and study of philosophical literature further whetted his appetite to get at the truth of things. Soon this inner urge became all-consuming and the doctor could carry on with his hospital work no more. He left his post and turned homeward. Back in India, he went to Kashi and Pandharpur. After wandering for a while in the Maharashtra country as a mendicant, he went to Rishikesh where he met his Guru who gave him Sannyas and the monastic name Sivananda. Sivananda now plunged into austerities of various kinds and after years of sustained self-discipline saw the Light of God.

Keen to share his new-found wisdom with seeking souls, Sivananda now founded the Divine Life Society and started writing. The speciality of Sivananda's writings is their practicality. Couched in lucid language, the books abound in detailed instructions on spiritual practice. The words come alive with a force that carries conviction.

The Master attained Mahasamadhi in 1963, but the Divine Life Society founded by him, the disciples trained by him and the books written by him continue to carry the torch of spiritual wisdom to all corners of the globe in ever-increasing measure.

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